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BY GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

Book One: A Game of Thrones
Book Two: A Clash of Kings
Book Three: A Storm of Swords
Book Four: A Feast for Crows
Book Five: A Dance with Dragons

A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms
Fire & Blood

The World of Ice & Fire:
The Untold History of Westeros
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A GAME OF THRONES

BOOK ONE OF
A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN



BANTAM
NEW YORK

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BRAN

The morning had dawned clear and cold, with a crispness that hinted at the end of summer. They set forth at daybreak to see a man beheaded, twenty in all, and Bran rode among them, nervous with excitement. This was the first time he had been deemed old enough to go with his lord father and his brothers to see the king's justice done. It was the ninth year of summer, and the seventh of Bran's life.

The man had been taken outside a small holdfast in the hills. Robb thought he was a wildling, his sword sworn to Mance Rayder, the King-beyond-the-Wall. It made Bran's skin prickle to think of it. He remembered the hearth tales Old Nan told them. The wildlings were cruel men, she said, slavers and slayers and thieves. They consorted with giants and ghouls, stole girl children in the dead of night, and drank blood from polished horns. And their women lay with the Others in the Long Night to sire terrible half-human children.

But the man they found bound hand and foot to the holdfast wall awaiting the king's justice was old and scrawny, not much taller than Robb. He had lost both ears and a finger to frostbite, and he dressed all in black,

the same as a brother of the Night's Watch, except that his furs were ragged and greasy.

The breath of man and horse mingled, steaming, in the cold morning air as his lord father had the man cut down from the wall and dragged before them. Robb and Jon sat tall and still on their horses, with Bran between them on his pony, trying to seem older than seven, trying to pretend that he'd seen all this before. A faint wind blew through the holdfast gate. Over their heads flapped the banner of the Starks of Winterfell: a grey direwolf racing across an ice-white field.

Bran's father sat solemnly on his horse, long brown hair stirring in the wind. His closely trimmed beard was shot with white, making him look older than his thirty-five years. He had a grim cast to his grey eyes this day, and he seemed not at all the man who would sit before the fire in the evening and talk softly of the age of heroes and the children of the forest. He had taken off Father's face, Bran thought, and donned the face of Lord Stark of Winterfell.

There were questions asked and answers given there in the chill of morning, but afterward Bran could not recall much of what had been said. Finally his lord father gave a command, and two of his guardsmen dragged the ragged man to the ironwood stump in the center of the square. They forced his head down onto the hard black wood. Lord Eddard Stark dismounted and his ward Theon Greyjoy brought forth the sword. "Ice," that sword was called. It was as wide across as a man's hand, and taller even than Robb. The blade was Valyrian steel, spell-forged and dark as smoke. Nothing held an edge like Valyrian steel.

His father peeled off his gloves and handed them to Jory Cassel, the captain of his household guard. He took hold of Ice with both hands and said, "In the name of Robert of the House Baratheon, the First of his Name, King of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, by the word of Eddard of the House Stark, Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, I do sentence you to die." He lifted the greatsword high above his head.

Bran's bastard brother Jon Snow moved closer. "Keep

the pony well in hand," he whispered. "And don't look away. Father will know if you do."

Bran kept his pony well in hand, and did not look away.

His father took off the man's head with a single sure stroke. Blood sprayed out across the snow, as red as summerwine. One of the horses reared and had to be restrained to keep from bolting. Bran could not take his eyes off the blood. The snows around the stump drank it eagerly, reddening as he watched.

The head bounced off a thick root and rolled. It came up near Greyjoy's feet. Theon was a lean, dark youth of nineteen who found everything amusing. He laughed, put his boot on the head, and kicked it away.

"Ass," Jon muttered, low enough so Greyjoy did not hear. He put a hand on Bran's shoulder, and Bran looked over at his bastard brother. "You did well," Jon told him solemnly. Jon was fourteen, an old hand at justice.

It seemed colder on the long ride back to Winterfell, though the wind had died by then and the sun was higher in the sky. Bran rode with his brothers, well ahead of the main party, his pony struggling hard to keep up with their horses.

"The deserter died bravely," Robb said. He was big and broad and growing every day, with his mother's coloring, the fair skin, red-brown hair, and blue eyes of the Tullys of Riverrun. "He had courage, at the least."

"No," Jon Snow said quietly. "It was not courage. This one was dead of fear. You could see it in his eyes, Stark." Jon's eyes were a grey so dark they seemed almost black, but there was little they did not see. He was of an age with Robb, but they did not look alike. Jon was slender where Robb was muscular, dark where Robb was fair, graceful and quick where his half brother was strong and fast.

Robb was not impressed. "The Others take his eyes," he swore. "He died well. Race you to the bridge?"

"Done," Jon said, kicking his horse forward. Robb cursed and followed, and they galloped off down the trail, Robb laughing and hooting, Jon silent and intent. The hooves of their horses kicked up showers of snow as they went.

Bran did not try to follow. His pony could not keep up.

He had seen the ragged man's eyes, and he was thinking of them now. After a while, the sound of Robb's laughter receded, and the woods grew silent again.

So deep in thought was he that he never heard the rest of the party until his father moved up to ride beside him. "Are you well, Bran?" he asked, not unkindly.

"Yes, Father," Bran told him. He looked up. Wrapped in his furs and leathers, mounted on his great warhorse, his lord father loomed over him like a giant. "Robb says the man died bravely, but Jon says he was afraid."

"What do you think?" his father asked.

Bran thought about it. "Can a man still be brave if he's afraid?"

"That is the only time a man can be brave," his father told him. "Do you understand why I did it?"

"He was a wildling," Bran said. "They carry off women and sell them to the Others."

His lord father smiled. "Old Nan has been telling you stories again. In truth, the man was an oathbreaker, a deserter from the Night's Watch. No man is more dangerous. The deserter knows his life is forfeit if he is taken, so he will not flinch from any crime, no matter how vile. But you mistake me. The question was not why the man had to die, but why *I* must do it."

Bran had no answer for that. "King Robert has a headsman," he said, uncertainly.

"He does," his father admitted. "As did the Targaryen kings before him. Yet our way is the older way. The blood of the First Men still flows in the veins of the Starks, and we hold to the belief that the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword. If you would take a man's life, you owe it to him to look into his eyes and hear his final words. And if you cannot bear to do that, then perhaps the man does not deserve to die."

"One day, Bran, you will be Robb's bannerman, holding a keep of your own for your brother and your king, and justice will fall to you. When that day comes, you must take no pleasure in the task, but neither must you look away. A ruler who hides behind paid executioners soon forgets what death is."

That was when Jon reappeared on the crest of the hill before them. He waved and shouted down at them. "*Fa-*

ther, Bran, come quickly, see what Robb has found!" Then he was gone again.

Jory rode up beside them. "Trouble, my lord?"

"Beyond a doubt," his lord father said. "Come, let us see what mischief my sons have rooted out now." He sent his horse into a trot. Jory and Bran and the rest came after.

They found Robb on the riverbank north of the bridge, with Jon still mounted beside him. The late summer snows had been heavy this moonturn. Robb stood knee-deep in white, his hood pulled back so the sun shone in his hair. He was cradling something in his arm, while the boys talked in hushed, excited voices.

The riders picked their way carefully through the drifts, groping for solid footing on the hidden, uneven ground. Jory Cassel and Theon Greyjoy were the first to reach the boys. Greyjoy was laughing and joking as he rode. Bran heard the breath go out of him. "*Gods!*" he exclaimed, struggling to keep control of his horse as he reached for his sword.

Jory's sword was already out. "Robb, get away from it!" he called as his horse reared under him.

Robb grinned and looked up from the bundle in his arms. "She can't hurt you," he said. "She's dead, Jory."

Bran was afire with curiosity by then. He would have spurred the pony faster, but his father made them dismount beside the bridge and approach on foot. Bran jumped off and ran.

By then Jon, Jory, and Theon Greyjoy had all dismounted as well. "What in the seven hells is it?" Greyjoy was saying.

"A wolf," Robb told him.

"A freak," Greyjoy said. "Look at the *size* of it."

Bran's heart was thumping in his chest as he pushed through a waist-high drift to his brothers' side.

Half-buried in bloodstained snow, a huge dark shape slumped in death. Ice had formed in its shaggy grey fur, and the faint smell of corruption clung to it like a woman's perfume. Bran glimpsed blind eyes crawling with maggots, a wide mouth full of yellowed teeth. But it was the size of it that made him gasp. It was bigger than his pony, twice the size of the largest hound in his father's kennel.

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A CLASH OF KINGS

BOOK TWO OF
A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN



BANTAM
NEW YORK

ARYA

At Winterfell they had called her "Arya Horseface" and she'd thought nothing could be worse, but that was before the orphan boy Lommy Greenhands had named her "Lumpyhead."

Her head *felt* lumpy when she touched it. When Yoren had dragged her into that alley she'd thought he meant to kill her, but the sour old man had only held her tight, sawing through her mats and tangles with his dagger. She remembered how the breeze sent the fistfuls of dirty brown hair skittering across the paving stones, toward the sept where her father had died. "I'm taking men and boys from the city," Yoren growled as the sharp steel scraped at her head. "Now you hold still, *boy*." By the time he had finished, her scalp was nothing but tufts and stubble.

Afterward he told her that from there to Winterfell she'd be Arry the orphan boy. "Gate shouldn't be hard, but the road's another matter. You got a long way to go in bad company. I got thirty this time, men and boys all bound for the Wall, and don't be thinking they're like

that bastard brother o' yours." He shook her. "Lord Eddard gave me pick o' the dungeons, and I didn't find no little lordlings down there. This lot, half o' them would turn you over to the queen quick as spit for a pardon and maybe a few silvers. The other half'd do the same, only they'd rape you first. So you keep to yourself and make your water in the woods, alone. That'll be the hardest part, the pissing, so don't drink no more'n you need."

Leaving King's Landing was easy, just like he'd said. The Lannister guardsmen on the gate were stopping everyone, but Yoren called one by name and their wagons were waved through. No one spared Arya a glance. They were looking for a highborn girl, daughter of the King's Hand, not for a skinny boy with his hair chopped off. Arya never looked back. She wished the Rush would rise and wash the whole city away, Flea Bottom and the Red Keep and the Great Sept and *everything*, and *everyone* too, especially Prince Joffrey and his mother. But she knew it wouldn't, and anyhow Sansa was still in the city and would wash away too. When she remembered that, Arya decided to wish for Winterfell instead.

Yoren was wrong about the pissing, though. That wasn't the hardest part at all; Lommy Greenhands and Hot Pie were the hardest part. Orphan boys. Yoren had plucked some from the streets with promises of food for their bellies and shoes for their feet. The rest he'd found in chains. "The Watch needs good men," he told them as they set out, "but you lot will have to do."

Yoren had taken grown men from the dungeons as well, thieves and poachers and rapers and the like. The worst were the three he'd found in the black cells who must have scared even him, because he kept them fettered hand and foot in the back of a wagon, and vowed they'd stay in irons all the way to the Wall. One had no nose, only the hole in his face where it had been cut off, and the gross fat bald one with the pointed teeth and the weeping sores on his cheeks had eyes like nothing human.

They took five wagons out of King's Landing, laden

with supplies for the Wall: hides and bolts of cloth, bars of pig iron, a cage of ravens, books and paper and ink, a bale of sourleaf, jars of oil, and chests of medicine and spices. Teams of plow horses pulled the wagons, and Yoren had bought two coursers and a half-dozen donkeys for the boys. Arya would have preferred a real horse, but the donkey was better than riding on a wagon.

The men paid her no mind, but she was not so lucky with the boys. She was two years younger than the youngest orphan, not to mention smaller and skinnier, and Lommy and Hot Pie took her silence to mean she was scared, or stupid, or deaf. "Look at that sword Lumpyhead's got there," Lommy said one morning as they made their plodding way past orchards and wheat fields. He'd been a dyer's apprentice before he was caught stealing, and his arms were mottled green to the elbow. When he laughed he brayed like the donkeys they were riding. "Where's a gutter rat like Lumpyhead get him a sword?"

Arya chewed her lip sullenly. She could see the back of Yoren's faded black cloak up ahead of the wagons, but she was determined not to go crying to him for help.

"Maybe he's a little squire," Hot Pie put in. His mother had been a baker before she died, and he'd pushed her cart through the streets all day, shouting "*Hot pies! Hot pies!*" "Some lordy lord's little squire boy, that's it."

"He ain't no squire, look at him. I bet that's not even a real sword. I bet it's just some play sword made of tin."

Arya hated them making fun of Needle. "It's castle-forged steel, you stupid," she snapped, turning in the saddle to glare at them, "and you better shut your mouth."

The orphan boys hooted. "Where'd you get a blade like that, Lumpyface?" Hot Pie wanted to know.

"Lumpyhead," corrected Lommy. "He prob'ly stole it."

"I did *not*!" she shouted. Jon Snow had given her Nee-

dle. Maybe she had to let them call her Lumpyhead, but she wasn't going to let them call Jon a thief.

"If he stole it, we could take it off him," said Hot Pie. "It's not his anyhow. I could use me a sword like that."

Lommy egged him on. "Go on, take it off him, I dare you."

Hot Pie kicked his donkey, riding closer. "Hey, Lumpyface, you gimme that sword." His hair was the color of straw, his fat face all sunburnt and peeling. "You don't know how to use it."

Yes I do, Arya could have said. *I killed a boy, a fat boy like you, I stabbed him in the belly and he died, and I'll kill you too if you don't let me alone.* Only she did not dare. Yoren didn't know about the stableboy, but she was afraid of what he might do if he found out. Arya was pretty sure that some of the other men were killers too, the three in the manacles for sure, but the queen wasn't looking for *them*, so it wasn't the same.

"Look at him," brayed Lommy Greenhands. "I bet he's going to cry now. You want to cry, Lumpyhead?"

She had cried in her sleep the night before, dreaming of her father. Come morning, she'd woken red-eyed and dry, and could not have shed another tear if her life had hung on it.

"He's going to wet his pants," Hot Pie suggested.

"Leave him be," said the boy with the shaggy black hair who rode behind them. Lommy had named *him* the Bull, on account of this horned helm he had that he polished all the time but never wore. Lommy didn't dare mock the Bull. He was older, and big for his age, with a broad chest and strong-looking arms.

"You better give Hot Pie the sword, Arry," Lommy said. "Hot Pie wants it bad. He kicked a boy to death. He'll do the same to you, I bet."

"I knocked him down and I kicked him in the balls, and I kept kicking him there until he was dead," Hot Pie boasted. "I kicked him all to pieces. His balls were broke open and bloody and his cock turned black. You better gimme the sword."

Arya slid her practice sword from her belt. "You can have this one," she told Hot Pie, not wanting to fight.

"That's just some stick." He rode nearer and tried to reach over for Needle's hilt.

Arya made the stick whistle as she laid the wood across his donkey's hindquarters. The animal *hawed* and bucked, dumping Hot Pie on the ground. She vaulted off her own donkey and poked him in the gut as he tried to get up and he sat back down with a grunt. Then she whacked him across the face and his nose made a *crack* like a branch breaking. Blood dribbled from his nostrils. When Hot Pie began to wail, Arya whirled toward Lommy Greenhands, who was sitting on his donkey openmouthed. "You want some sword too?" she yelled, but he didn't. He raised dyed green hands in front of his face and squealed at her to get away.

The Bull shouted, "Behind you," and Arya spun. Hot Pie was on his knees, his fist closing around a big jagged rock. She let him throw it, ducking her head as it sailed past. Then she flew at him. He raised a hand and she hit it, and then his cheek, and then his knee. He grabbed for her, and she danced aside and bounced the wood off the back of his head. He fell down and got up and stumbled after her, his red face all smeared with dirt and blood. Arya slid into a water dancer's stance and waited. When he came close enough, she lunged, right between his legs, so hard that if her wooden sword had had a point it would have come out between his butt cheeks.

By the time Yoren pulled her off him, Hot Pie was sprawled out on the ground with his breeches brown and smelly, crying as Arya whapped him over and over and over. "Enough," the black brother roared, prying the stick sword from her fingers, "you want to kill the fool?" When Lommy and some others started to squeal, the old man turned on them too. "Shut your mouths, or I'll be shutting them for you. Any more o' this, I'll tie you lot behind the wagons and *drag* you to the Wall." He spat. "And that goes twice for you, Arry. You come with me, boy. Now."

They were all looking at her, even the three chained and manacled in the back of the wagon. The fat one snapped his pointy teeth together and *hissed*, but Arya ignored him.

The old man dragged her well off the road into a tangle of trees, cursing and muttering all the while. "If I had a thimble o' sense, I would've left you in King's Landing. You hear me, boy?" He always snarled that word, putting a bite in it so she would be certain to hear. "Unlace your breeches and pull 'em down. Go on, there's no one here to see. Do it." Sullenly, Arya did as he said. "Over there, against the oak. Yes, like that." She wrapped her arms around the trunk and pressed her face to the rough wood. "You scream now. You scream loud."

I won't, Arya thought stubbornly, but when Yoren laid the wood against the back of her bare thighs, the shriek burst out of her anyway. "Think that hurt?" he said. "Try this one." The stick came whistling. Arya shrieked again, clutching the tree to keep from falling. "One more." She held on tight, chewing her lip, flinching when she heard it coming. The stroke made her jump and howl. *I won't cry*, she thought, *I won't do that. I'm a Stark of Winterfell, our sigil is the direwolf, direwolves don't cry*. She could feel a thin trickle of blood running down her left leg. Her thighs and cheeks were ablaze with pain. "Might be I got your attention now," Yoren said. "Next time you take that stick to one of your brothers, you'll get twice what you give, you hear me? Now cover yourself."

They're not my brothers, Arya thought as she bent to yank up her breeches, but she knew better than to say so. Her hands fumbled with her belt and laces.

Yoren was looking at her. "You hurt?"

Calm as still water, she told herself, the way Syrio Forel had taught her. "Some."

He spat. "That pie boy's hurting worse. It wasn't him as killed your father, girl, nor that thieving Lommy neither. Hitting them won't bring him back."

"I know," Arya muttered sullenly.

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A STORM OF SWORDS

**BOOK THREE OF
A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE**

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN



**BANTAM
NEW YORK**

JAIME

A n east wind blew through his tangled hair, as soft and fragrant as Cersei's fingers. He could hear birds singing, and feel the river moving beneath the boat as the sweep of the oars sent them toward the pale pink dawn. After so long in darkness, the world was so sweet that Jaime Lannister felt dizzy. *I am alive, and drunk on sunlight.* A laugh burst from his lips, sudden as a quail flushed from cover.

"Quiet," the wench grumbled, scowling. Scowls suited her broad homely face better than a smile. Not that Jaime had ever seen her smiling. He amused himself by picturing her in one of Cersei's silken gowns in place of her studded leather jerkin. *As well dress a cow in silk as this one.*

But the cow could row. Beneath her roughspun brown breeches were calves like cords of wood, and the long muscles of her arms stretched and tightened with each stroke of the oars. Even after rowing half the night, she showed no signs of tiring, which was more than could be said for his cousin Ser Cleos, laboring on the other oar. *A big strong peasant wench to look at her, yet she speaks like one*

highborn and wears longsword and dagger. Ah, but can she use them? Jaime meant to find out, as soon as he rid himself of these fetters.

He wore iron manacles on his wrists and a matching pair about his ankles, joined by a length of heavy chain no more than a foot long. "You'd think my word as a Lannister was not good enough," he'd japed as they bound him. He'd been very drunk by then, thanks to Catelyn Stark. Of their escape from Riverrun, he recalled only bits and pieces. There had been some trouble with the gaoler, but the big wench had overcome him. After that they had climbed an endless stair, around and around. His legs were weak as grass, and he'd stumbled twice or thrice, until the wench lent him an arm to lean on. At some point he was bundled into a traveler's cloak and shoved into the bottom of a skiff. He remembered listening to Lady Catelyn command someone to raise the portcullis on the Water Gate. She was sending Ser Cleos Frey back to King's Landing with new terms for the queen, she'd declared in a tone that brooked no argument.

He must have drifted off then. The wine had made him sleepy, and it felt good to stretch, a luxury his chains had not permitted him in the cell. Jaime had long ago learned to snatch sleep in the saddle during a march. This was no harder. *Tyion is going to laugh himself sick when he hears how I slept through my own escape.* He was awake now, though, and the fetters were irksome. "My lady," he called out, "if you'll strike off these chains, I'll spell you at those oars."

She scowled again, her face all horse teeth and glowering suspicion. "You'll wear your chains, Kingslayer."

"You figure to row all the way to King's Landing, wench?"

"You will call me Brienne. Not wench."

"My name is Ser Jaime. Not Kingslayer."

"Do you deny that you slew a king?"

"No. Do you deny your sex? If so, unlace those breeches and show me." He gave her an innocent smile. "I'd ask you to open your bodice, but from the look of you that wouldn't prove much."

Ser Cleos fretted. "Cousin, remember your courtesies."

The Lannister blood runs thin in this one. Cleos was his Aunt Genna's son by that dullard Emmon Frey, who had

lived in terror of Lord Tywin Lannister since the day he wed his sister. When Lord Walder Frey had brought the Twins into the war on the side of Riverrun, Ser Emmon had chosen his wife's allegiance over his father's. *Casterly Rock got the worst of that bargain*, Jaime reflected. Ser Cleos looked like a weasel, fought like a goose, and had the courage of an especially brave ewe. Lady Stark had promised him release if he delivered her message to Tyrion, and Ser Cleos had solemnly vowed to do so.

They'd all done a deal of vowing back in that cell, Jaime most of all. That was Lady Catelyn's price for loosing him. She had laid the point of the big wench's sword against his heart and said, "Swear that you will never again take up arms against Stark nor Tully. Swear that you will compel your brother to honor his pledge to return my daughters safe and unharmed. Swear on your honor as a knight, on your honor as a Lannister, on your honor as a Sworn Brother of the Kingsguard. Swear it by your sister's life, and your father's, and your son's, by the old gods and the new, and I'll send you back to your sister. Refuse, and I will have your blood." He remembered the prick of the steel through his rags as she twisted the point of the sword.

I wonder what the High Septon would have to say about the sanctity of oaths sworn while dead drunk, chained to a wall, with a sword pressed to your chest? Not that Jaime was truly concerned about that fat fraud, or the gods he claimed to serve. He remembered the pail Lady Catelyn had kicked over in his cell. A strange woman, to trust her girls to a man with shit for honor. Though she was trusting him as little as she dared. She is putting her hope in Tyrion, not in me. "Perhaps she is not so stupid after all," he said aloud.

His captor took it wrong. "I am not stupid. Nor deaf."

He was gentle with her, mocking this one would be so easy there would be no sport to it. "I was speaking to myself, and not of you. It's an easy habit to slip into in a cell."

She frowned at him, pushing the oars forward, pulling them back, pushing them forward, saying nothing.

As glib of tongue as she is fair of face. "By your speech, I'd judge you nobly born."

"My father is Selwyn of Tarth, by the grace of the gods Lord of Evenfall." Even that was given grudgingly.

"Tarth," Jaime said. "A ghastly large rock in the narrow sea, as I recall. And Evenfall is sworn to Storm's End. How is it that you serve Robb of Winterfell?"

"It is Lady Catelyn I serve. And she commanded me to deliver you safe to your brother Tyrion at King's Landing, not to bandy words with you. Be silent."

"I've had a bellyful of silence, woman."

"Talk with Ser Cleos then. I have no words for monsters."

Jaime hooted. "Are there monsters hereabouts? Hiding beneath the water, perhaps? In that thick of willows? And me without my sword!"

"A man who would violate his own sister, murder his king, and fling an innocent child to his death deserves no other name."

Innocent? The wretched boy was spying on us. All Jaime had wanted was an hour alone with Cersei. Their journey north had been one long torment; seeing her every day, unable to touch her, knowing that Robert stumbled drunkenly into her bed every night in that great creaking wheelhouse. Tyrion had done his best to keep him in a good humor, but it had not been enough. "You will be courteous as concerns Cersei, wench," he warned her.

"My name is Brienne, not wench."

"What do you care what a monster calls you?"

"My name is Brienne," she repeated, dogged as a hound.

"Lady Brienne?" She looked so uncomfortable that Jaime sensed a weakness. "Or would Ser Brienne be more to your taste?" He laughed. "No, I fear not. You can trick out a milk cow in crupper, crinet, and chamfron, and bard her all in silk, but that doesn't mean you can ride her into battle."

"Cousin Jaime, please, you ought not speak so roughly." Under his cloak, Ser Cleos wore a surcoat quartered with the twin towers of House Frey and the golden lion of Lannister. "We have far to go, we should not quarrel amongst ourselves."

"When I quarrel I do it with a sword, coz. I was speaking to the lady. Tell me, wench, are all the women on Tarth as homely as you? I pity the men, if so. Perhaps they do not know what real women look like, living on a dreary mountain in the sea."

"Tarth is beautiful," the wench grunted between strokes. "The Sapphire Isle, it's called. Be quiet, monster, unless you mean to make me gag you."

"She's rude as well, isn't she, coz?" Jaime asked Ser Cleos. "Though she has steel in her spine, I'll grant you. Not many men dare name me monster to my face." *Though behind my back they speak freely enough, I have no doubt.*

Ser Cleos coughed nervously. "Lady Brienne had those lies from Catelyn Stark, no doubt. The Starks cannot hope to defeat you with swords, ser, so now they make war with poisoned words."

They did defeat me with swords, you chinless cretin. Jaime smiled knowingly. Men will read all sorts of things into a knowing smile, if you let them. *Has cousin Cleos truly swallowed this kettle of dung, or is he striving to ingratiate himself? What do we have here, an honest mutthead or a lickspittle?*

Ser Cleos prattled blithely on. "Any man who'd believe that a Sworn Brother of the Kingsguard would harm a child does not know the meaning of honor."

Lickspittle. If truth be told, Jaime had come to rue heaving Brandon Stark out that window. Cersei had given him no end of grief afterward, when the boy refused to die. "He was seven, Jaime," she'd berated him. "Even if he understood what he saw, we should have been able to frighten him into silence."

"I didn't think you'd want—"

"You *never* think. If the boy should wake and tell his father what he saw—"

"If if if." He had pulled her into his lap. "If he wakes we'll say he was dreaming, we'll call him a liar, and should worse come to worst I'll kill Ned Stark."

"And then what do you imagine Robert will do?"

"Let Robert do as he pleases. I'll go to war with him if I must. The War for Cersei's Cunt, the singers will call it."

"Jaime, let go of me!" she raged, struggling to rise.

Instead he had kissed her. For a moment she resisted, but then her mouth opened under his. He remembered the taste of wine and cloves on her tongue. She gave a shudder. His hand went to her bodice and yanked, tearing the silk so her breasts spilled free, and for a time the Stark boy had been forgotten.

Had Cersei remembered him afterward and hired this man Lady Catelyn spoke of, to make sure the boy never woke? *If she wanted him dead she would have sent me. And it is not like her to chose a catspaw who would make such a royal botch of the killing.*

Downriver, the rising sun shimmered against the wind-whipped surface of the river. The south shore was red clay, smooth as any road. Smaller streams fed into the greater, and the rotting trunks of drowned trees clung to the banks. The north shore was wilder. High rocky bluffs rose twenty feet above them, crowned by stands of beech, oak, and chestnut. Jaime spied a watchtower on the heights ahead, growing taller with every stroke of the oars. Long before they were upon it, he knew that it stood abandoned, its weathered stones overgrown with climbing roses.

When the wind shifted, Ser Cleos helped the big wench run up the sail, a stiff triangle of striped red-and-blue canvas. Tully colors, sure to cause them grief if they encountered any Lannister forces on the river, but it was the only sail they had. Brienne took the rudder. Jaime threw out the leeboard, his chains rattling as he moved. After that, they made better speed, with wind and current both favoring their flight. "We could save a deal of traveling if you delivered me to my father instead of my brother," he pointed out.

"Lady Catelyn's daughters are in King's Landing. I will return with the girls or not at all."

Jaime turned to Ser Cleos. "Cousin, lend me your knife."

"No." The woman tensed. "I will not have you armed." Her voice was as unyielding as stone.

She fears me, even in irons. "Cleos, it seems I must ask you to shave me. Leave the beard, but take the hair off my head."

"You'd be shaved bald?" asked Cleos Frey.

"The realm knows Jaime Lannister as a beardless knight with long golden hair. A bald man with a filthy yellow beard may pass unnoticed. I'd sooner not be recognized while I'm in irons."

The dagger was not as sharp as it might have been. Cleos hacked away manfully, sawing and ripping his way through the mats and tossing the hair over the side. The golden curls floated on the surface of the water, gradually falling

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A FEAST FOR CROWS

**BOOK FOUR OF
A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE**

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THE PROPHET

The prophet was drowning men on Great Wyk when they came to tell him that the king was dead.

It was a bleak, cold morning, and the sea was as leaden as the sky. The first three men had offered their lives to the Drowned God fearlessly, but the fourth was weak in faith and began to struggle as his lungs cried out for air. Standing waist-deep in the surf, Aeron seized the naked boy by the shoulders and pushed his head back down as he tried to snatch a breath. "Have courage," he said. "We came from the sea, and to the sea we must return. Open your mouth and drink deep of god's blessing. Fill your lungs with water, that you may die and be reborn. It does no good to fight."

Either the boy could not hear him with his head beneath the waves, or else his faith had utterly deserted him. He began to kick and thrash so wildly that Aeron had to call

for help. Four of his drowned men waded out to seize the wretch and hold him underwater. "Lord God who drowned for us," the priest prayed, in a voice as deep as the sea, "let Emmond your servant be reborn from the sea, as you were. Bless him with salt, bless him with stone, bless him with steel."

Finally, it was done. No more air was bubbling from his mouth, and all the strength had gone out of his limbs. Facedown in the shallow sea floated Emmond, pale and cold and peaceful.

That was when the Damphair realized that three horsemen had joined his drowned men on the pebbled shore. Aeron knew the Sparr, a hatchet-faced old man with watery eyes whose quavery voice was law on this part of Great Wyk. His son Steffarion accompanied him, with another youth whose dark red fur-lined cloak was pinned at the shoulder with an ornate brooch that showed the black-and-gold warhorn of the Goodbrothers. *One of Gorold's sons*, the priest decided at a glance. Three tall sons had been born to Goodbrother's wife late in life, after a dozen daughters, and it was said that no man could tell one son from the others. Aeron Damphair did not deign to try. Whether this be Greydon or Gormond or Gran, the priest had no time for him.

He growled a brusque command, and his drowned men seized the dead boy by his arms and legs to carry him above the tideline. The priest followed, naked but for a sealskin clout that covered his private parts. Goosefleshed and dripping, he splashed back onto land, across cold wet sand and sea-scoured pebbles. One of his drowned men handed him a robe of heavy roughspun dyed in mottled greens and blues and greys, the colors of the sea and the Drowned God. Aeron donned the robe and pulled his hair free. Black and wet, that hair; no blade had touched it

since the sea had raised him up. It draped his shoulders like a ragged, ropy cloak, and fell down past his waist. Aeron wove strands of seaweed through it, and through his tangled, uncut beard.

His drowned men formed a circle around the dead boy, praying. Norjen worked his arms whilst Rus knelt astride him, pumping on his chest, but all moved aside for Aeron. He pried apart the boy's cold lips with his fingers and gave Emmond the kiss of life, and again, and again, until the sea came gushing from his mouth. The boy began to cough and spit, and his eyes blinked open, full of fear.

Another one returned. It was a sign of the Drowned God's favor, men said. Every other priest lost a man from time to time, even Tarle the Thrice-Drowned, who had once been thought so holy that he was picked to crown a king. But never Aeron Greyjoy. He was the Damphair, who had seen the god's own watery halls and returned to tell of it. "Rise," he told the sputtering boy as he slapped him on his naked back. "You have drowned and been returned to us. What is dead can never die."

"But rises." The boy coughed violently, bringing up more water. "Rises again." Every word was bought with pain, but that was the way of the world; a man must fight to live. "Rises again." Emmond staggered to his feet. "Harder. And stronger."

"You belong to the god now," Aeron told him. The other drowned men gathered round and each gave him a punch and a kiss to welcome him to the brotherhood. One helped him don a roughspun robe of mottled blue and green and grey. Another presented him with a driftwood cudgel. "You belong to the sea now, so the sea has armed you," Aeron said. "We pray that you shall wield your cudgel fiercely, against all the enemies of our god."

Only then did the priest turn to the three riders,

watching from their saddles. "Have you come to be drowned, my lords?"

The Sparr coughed. "I was drowned as a boy," he said, "and my son upon his name day."

Aeron snorted. That Steffarion Sparr had been given to the Drowned God soon after birth he had no doubt. He knew the manner of it too, a quick dip into a tub of seawater that scarce wet the infant's head. Small wonder the ironborn had been conquered, they who once held sway everywhere the sound of waves was heard. "That is no true drowning," he told the riders. "He that does not die in truth cannot hope to rise from death. Why have you come, if not to prove your faith?"

"Lord Gorold's son came seeking you, with news." The Sparr indicated the youth in the red cloak.

The boy looked to be no more than six-and-ten. "Aye, and which are you?" Aeron demanded.

"Gormond. Gormond Goodbrother, if it please my lord."

"It is the Drowned God we must please. Have you been drowned, Gormond Goodbrother?"

"On my name day, Damphair. My father sent me to find you and bring you to him. He needs to see you."

"Here I stand. Let Lord Gorold come and feast his eyes." Aeron took a leather skin from Rus, freshly filled with water from the sea. The priest pulled out the cork and took a swallow.

"I am to bring you to the keep," insisted young Gormond, from atop his horse.

He is afraid to dismount, lest he get his boots wet. "I have the god's work to do." Aeron Greyjoy was a prophet. He did not suffer petty lords ordering him about like some thrall.

"Gorold's had a bird," said the Sparr.

"A maester's bird, from Pyke," Gormond confirmed.

Dark wings, dark words. "The ravens fly o'er salt and stone. If there are tidings that concern me, speak them now."

"Such tidings as we bear are for your ears alone, Damphair," the Sparr said. "These are not matters I would speak of here before these others."

"*These others* are my drowned men, god's servants, just as I am. I have no secrets from them, nor from our god, beside whose holy sea I stand."

The horsemen exchanged a look. "Tell him," said the Sparr, and the youth in the red cloak summoned up his courage. "The king is dead," he said, as plain as that. Four small words, yet the sea itself trembled when he uttered them.

Four kings there were in Westeros, yet Aeron did not need to ask which one was meant. Balon Greyjoy ruled the Iron Islands, and no other. *The king is dead. How can that be?* Aeron had seen his eldest brother not a moon's turn past, when he had returned to the Iron Islands from harrying the Stony Shore. Balon's grey hair had gone half-white whilst the priest had been away, and the stoop in his shoulders was more pronounced than when the longships sailed. Yet all in all the king had not seemed ill.

Aeron Greyjoy had built his life upon two mighty pillars. Those four small words had knocked one down. *Only the Drowned God remains to me. May he make me as strong and tireless as the sea.* "Tell me the manner of my brother's death."

"His Grace was crossing a bridge at Pyke when he fell and was dashed upon the rocks below."

The Greyjoy stronghold stood upon a broken headland, its keeps and towers built atop massive stone stacks that thrust up from the sea. Bridges knotted Pyke together; arched bridges of carved stone and swaying spans of

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A DANCE WITH DRAGONS

BOOK FIVE OF
A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

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TYRION

He drank his way across the narrow sea.

The ship was small, his cabin smaller, but the captain would not allow him abovedecks. The rocking of the deck beneath his feet made his stomach heave, and the wretched food tasted even worse when retched back up. But why did he need salt beef, hard cheese, and bread crawling with worms when he had wine to nourish him? It was red and sour, very strong. Sometimes he heaved the wine up too, but there was always more.

"The world is full of wine," he muttered in the dankness of his cabin. His father never had any use for drunkards, but what did that matter? His father was dead. He'd killed him. *A bolt in the belly, my lord, and all for you. If only I was better with a crossbow, I would have put it through that cock you made me with, you bloody bastard.*

Belowdecks, there was neither night nor day. Tyrion marked time by the comings and goings of the cabin boy who brought the meals he did not eat. The boy always brought a brush and bucket too, to clean up. "Is this Dornish wine?" Tyrion asked him once, as he pulled a stopper from a skin. "It reminds me of a certain snake I knew. A droll fellow, till a mountain fell on him."

The cabin boy did not answer. He was an ugly boy, though admittedly more comely than a certain dwarf with half a nose and a scar from eye to chin. "Have I offended you?" Tyrion asked, as the boy was scrubbing. "Were you commanded not to talk to me? Or did some dwarf diddle your mother?" That went unanswered too. "Where are we sailing? Tell me that." Jaime had made mention of the Free Cities, but had never said which one. "Is it Braavos? Tyrosh? Myr?" Tyrion would sooner

A DANCE WITH DRAGONS

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have gone to Dorne. *Myrcella is older than Tommen, by Dornish law the Iron Throne is hers. I will help her claim her rights, as Prince Oberyn suggested.*

Oberyn was dead, though, his head smashed to bloody ruin by the armored fist of Ser Gregor Clegane. And without the Red Viper to urge him on, would Doran Martell even consider such a chancy scheme? *He might clap me in chains instead and hand me back to my sweet sister. The Wall might be safer.* Old Bear Mormont said the Night's Watch had need of men like Tyrion. *Mormont might be dead, though. By now Slynt may be the lord commander.* That butcher's son was not like to have forgotten who sent him to the Wall. *Do I really want to spend the rest of my life eating salt beef and porridge with murderers and thieves?* Not that the rest of his life would last very long. Janos Slynt would see to that.

The cabin boy wet his brush and scrubbed on manfully. "Have you ever visited the pleasure houses of Lys?" the dwarf inquired. "Might that be where whores go?" Tyrion could not seem to recall the Valyrian word for whore, and in any case it was too late. The boy tossed his brush back in his bucket and took his leave.

The wine has blurred my wits. He had learned to read High Valyrian at his maester's knee, though what they spoke in the Nine Free Cities . . . well, it was not so much a dialect as nine dialects on the way to becoming separate tongues. Tyrion had some Braavosi and a smattering of Myrish. In Tyrosh he should be able to curse the gods, call a man a cheat, and order up an ale, thanks to a sellsword he had once known at the Rock. *At least in Dorne they speak the Common Tongue.* Like Dornish food and Dornish law, Dornish speech was spiced with the flavors of the Rhoynce, but a man could comprehend it. *Dorne, yes, Dorne for me.* He crawled into his bunk, clutching that thought like a child with a doll.

Sleep had never come easily to Tyrion Lannister. Aboard that ship it seldom came at all, though from time to time he managed to drink sufficient wine to pass out for a while. At least he did not dream. He had dreamed enough for one small life. *And of such follies: love, justice, friendship, glory. As well dream of being tall.* It was all beyond his reach, Tyrion knew now. But he did not know where whores go.

"Wherever whores go," his father had said. *His last words,*

and what words they were. The crossbow thrummed, Lord Tywin sat back down, and Tyrion Lannister found himself waddling through the darkness with Varys at his side. He must have clambered back down the shaft, two hundred and thirty rungs to where orange embers glowed in the mouth of an iron dragon. He remembered none of it. Only the sound the crossbow made, and the stink of his father's bowels opening. *Even in his dying, he found a way to shit on me.*

Varys had escorted him through the tunnels, but they never spoke until they emerged beside the Blackwater, where Tyrion had won a famous victory and lost a nose. That was when the dwarf turned to the eunuch and said, "I've killed my father," in the same tone a man might use to say, "I've stubbed my toe."

The master of whisperers had been dressed as a begging brother, in a moth-eaten robe of brown roughspun with a cowl that shadowed his smooth fat cheeks and bald round head. "You should not have climbed that ladder," he said reproachfully.

"Wherever whores go," Tyrion had warned his father not to say that word. *If I had not loosed, he would have seen my threats were empty. He would have taken the crossbow from my hands, as once he took Tysha from my arms. He was rising when I killed him.*

"I killed Shae too," he confessed to Varys.

"You knew what she was."

"I did. But I never knew what he was."

Varys tittered. "And now you do."

I should have killed the eunuch as well. A little more blood on his hands, what would it matter? He could not say what had stayed his dagger. Not gratitude. Varys had saved him from a headsman's sword, but only because Jaime had compelled him. *Jaime . . . no, better not to think of Jaime.*

He found a fresh skin of wine instead and sucked at it as if it were a woman's breast. The sour red ran down his chin and soaked through his soiled tunic, the same one he had been wearing in his cell. The deck was swaying beneath his feet, and when he tried to rise it lifted sideways and smashed him hard against a bulkhead. *A storm, he realized, or else I am even drunker than I knew.* He retched the wine up and lay in it a while, wondering if the ship would sink. *Is this your vengeance, Father? Has the Father Above made you his Hand?*

"Such are the wages of the kinslayer," he said as the wind howled outside. It did not seem fair to drown the cabin boy and the captain and all the rest for something he had done, but when had the gods ever been fair? And around about then, the darkness gulped him down.

When he stirred again, his head felt like to burst and the ship was spinning round in dizzy circles, though the captain was insisting that they'd come to port. Tyrion told him to be quiet and kicked feebly as a huge bald sailor tucked him under one arm and carried him squirming to the hold, where an empty wine cask awaited him. It was a squat little cask, and a tight fit even for a dwarf. Tyrion pissed himself in his struggles, for all the good it did. He was crammed face-first into the cask with his knees pushed up against his ears. The stub of his nose itched horribly, but his arms were pinned so tightly that he could not reach to scratch it. *A palanquin fit for a man of my stature,* he thought as they hammered shut the lid. He could hear voices shouting as he was hoisted up. Every bounce cracked his head against the bottom of the cask. The world went round and round as the cask rolled downward, then stopped with a crash that made him want to scream. Another cask slammed into his, and Tyrion bit his tongue.

That was the longest journey he had ever taken, though it could not have lasted more than half an hour. He was lifted and lowered, rolled and stacked, upended and righted and rolled again. Through the wooden staves he heard men shouting, and once a horse whickered nearby. His stunted legs began to cramp, and soon hurt so badly that he forgot the hammering in his head.

It ended as it had begun, with another roll that left him dizzy and more jouncing. Outside, strange voices were speaking in a tongue he did not know. Someone started pounding on the top of the cask and the lid cracked open suddenly. Light came flooding in, and cool air as well. Tyrion gasped greedily and tried to stand, but only managed to knock the cask over sideways and spill himself out onto a hard-packed earthen floor.

Above him loomed a grotesque fat man with a forked yellow beard, holding a wooden mallet and an iron chisel. His bedrobe was large enough to serve as a tourney pavilion, but its loosely knotted belt had come undone, exposing a huge white belly and a pair of heavy breasts that sagged like sacks

of suet covered with coarse yellow hair. He reminded Tyrion of a dead sea cow that had once washed up in the caverns under Casterly Rock.

The fat man looked down and smiled. "A drunken dwarf," he said, in the Common Tongue of Westeros.

"A rotting sea cow." Tyrion's mouth was full of blood. He spat it at the fat man's feet. They were in a long, dim cellar with barrel-vaulted ceilings, its stone walls spotted with nitre. Casks of wine and ale surrounded them, more than enough drink to see a thirsty dwarf safely through the night. *Or through a life.*

"You are insolent. I like that in a dwarf." When the fat man laughed, his flesh bounced so vigorously that Tyrion was afraid he might fall and crush him. "Are you hungry, my little friend? Weary?"

"Thirsty." Tyrion struggled to his knees. "And filthy."

The fat man sniffed. "A bath first, just so. Then food and a soft bed, yes? My servants shall see to it." His host put the mallet and chisel aside. "My house is yours. Any friend of my friend across the water is a friend to Illyrio Mopatis, yes."

And any friend of Varys the Spider is someone I will trust just as far as I can throw him.

The fat man made good on the promised bath, though. No sooner did Tyrion lower himself into the hot water and close his eyes than he was fast asleep. He woke naked on a goose-down feather bed so soft it felt as if he had been swallowed by a cloud. His tongue was growing hair and his throat was raw, but his cock was as hard as an iron bar. He rolled from the bed, found a chamber pot, and commenced to filling it, with a groan of pleasure.

The room was dim, but there were bars of yellow sunlight showing between the slats of the shutters. Tyrion shook the last drops off and waddled over patterned Myrish carpets as soft as new spring grass. Awkwardly he climbed the window seat and flung the shutters open to see where Varys and the gods had sent him.

Beneath his window six cherry trees stood sentinel around a marble pool, their slender branches bare and brown. A naked boy stood on the water, poised to duel with a bravo's blade in hand. He was lithe and handsome, no older than sixteen, with straight blond hair that brushed his shoulders. So lifelike did

he seem that it took the dwarf a long moment to realize he was made of painted marble, though his sword shimmered like true steel.

Across the pool stood a brick wall twelve feet high, with iron spikes along its top. Beyond that was the city. A sea of tiled rooftops crowded close around a bay. He saw square brick towers, a great red temple, a distant manse upon a hill. In the far distance, sunlight shimmered off deep water. Fishing boats were moving across the bay, their sails rippling in the wind, and he could see the masts of larger ships poking up along the shore. *Surely one is bound for Dorne, or for Eastwatch-by-the-Sea.* He had no means to pay for passage, though, nor was he made to pull an oar. *I suppose I could sign on as a cabin boy and earn my way by letting the crew bugger me up and down the narrow sea.*

He wondered where he was. *Even the air smells different here.* Strange spices scented the chilly autumn wind, and he could hear faint cries drifting over the wall from the streets beyond. It sounded something like Valyrian, but he did not recognize more than one word in five. *Not Braavos, he concluded, nor Tyrosh.* Those bare branches and the chill in the air argued against Lys and Myr and Volantis as well.

When he heard the door opening behind him, Tyrion turned to confront his fat host. "This is Pentos, yes?"

"Just so. Where else?"

Pentos. Well, it was not King's Landing, that much could be said for it. "Where do whores go?" he heard himself ask.

"Whores are found in brothels here, as in Westeros. You will have no need of such, my little friend. Choose from amongst my servingwomen. None will dare refuse you."

"Slaves?" the dwarf asked pointedly.

The fat man stroked one of the prongs of his oiled yellow beard, a gesture Tyrion found remarkably obscene. "Slavery is forbidden in Pentos, by the terms of the treaty the Braavosi imposed on us a hundred years ago. Still, they will not refuse you." Illyrio gave a ponderous half bow. "But now my little friend must excuse me. I have the honor to be a magister of this great city, and the prince has summoned us to session." He smiled, showing a mouth full of crooked yellow teeth. "Explore the manse and grounds as you like, but on no account