ARMOUR HUNT

An ear-splitting roar pierced through the chilly night air, followed by a petrified scream from the maid. Soon after, the old priest burst out, his almost featherless pelican dæmon fluttering behind him. Iorek charged out, sending pieces of costly brick and smashed glass flying.

The four hundred and ninety-nine-kilo *panserbjørn* reared up onto his powerful hind legs and the ice below showed cracks of pain under the force of the armoured bear. The starry sky became littered and filled with clouds of thick dust and the ground became black, with a carpet of bricks, glass and rubble dumped onto it.

All Lyra could do was stare at the mighty bear. Silence. Lyra was certainly not the only one. As she gazed around, she could see all the townsfolk huddled up in fear and gawping at Iorek. A little wheeze from the poor priest abruptly broke the tense silence.

Every face turned towards the priest as he coughed and spluttered scarlet blood on the icy ground. Every face, including Iorek’s. The white bear turned his great head, lunged at the priest and grabbed his head in his razor-sharp jaws. Several townsfolk screamed and ran home to their cabins, sheltering their young children’s eyes from such a gruesome sight. However, a few stayed rooted to the ice, as if they were frozen statues.

Lyra unfroze and walked forward to Iorek and Pantalaimon, who was now a quivering wildcat, tried his best to pull Lyra back, but failed badly. Instead he stumbled back a bit, whilst Lyra kept pulling forward, to the giant bear.

“Stop!” she whispered, and grabbed at a gap in Iorek’s armour, in a vulnerable part by his throat. “Come with me and let go of the priest. Let’s just walk away. Leave them!”

Iorek considered for a moment and loosened his grip on the priest’s head, so that he only just had a grip.

“Drop it!”

Iorek let go of the priest’s bloody head and looked at Lyra, fascinated. The police had just turned up with their rifles, but Lyra and Iorek both knew that they were no match for the bear in full armour. Pantalaimon turned into a joyful sparrow and swooped cheerfully onto Iorek’s back, as if he had no care in the whole world.

The policemen slowly, but cautiously lowered their guns and watched in awe as Lyra stroked Iorek’s soft fur and gently lead him down to the deep-blue sea. Even the priest lifted his wounded head to watch in amazement. The way the young girl handled the panserbjørn with tenderness and care fascinated the townsfolk and priest. Especially after what he had done, but it gave of a kind of warmness.

Iorek, Pan and Lyra peacefully strolled on, becoming smaller, smaller and smaller in the distance, nobody daring to break the calmness of Trollesund at this particular moment.

All the police dropped their guns and the priest finally stopped choking. Several policemen and the remaining townsfolk ran to help the priest and then the town became busy and noisy again.

Meanwhile, Lyra, Pantalaimon and Iorek, were by the sea with John Faa and Farder Coram. Iorek dove powerfully into the calm water whilst Lyra went to speak to John Faa and Farder Coram.

Moments later, Iorek climbed onto the ice with a fat seal clamped in his jaws. Lyra watched intensely as he sliced open its belly with one claw and ripped out a rubbery-looking tube. He started rubbing the tube on his armour and told Lyra the tube was called seal blubber. Instantly, the armour looked less rusty and old.

John Faa cleared his throat and said:

“Right, let’s get down to business…”