



DAENERYS

Her Dothraki scouts had told her how it was, but Dany wanted to see for herself. Ser Jorah Mormont rode with her through a birchwood forest and up a slanting sandstone ridge. “Near enough,” he warned her at the crest.

Dany reined in her mare and looked across the fields, to where the Yunkish host lay athwart her path. Whitebeard had been teaching her how best to count the numbers of a foe. “Five thousand,” she said after a moment.

“I’d say so.” Ser Jorah pointed. “Those are sellswords on the flanks. Lances and mounted bowmen, with swords and axes for the close work. The Second Sons on the left wing, the Stormcrows to the right. About five hundred men apiece. See the banners?”

Yunkai’s harpy grasped a whip and iron collar in her talons instead of a length of chain. But the sellswords flew their own standards beneath those of the city they served: on the right four crows between crossed thunderbolts, on the left a broken sword. “The Yunkai’s hold the center themselves,” Dany noted. Their officers looked indistinguishable from Astapor’s at a distance; tall bright helms and cloaks sewn with flashing copper disks. “Are those slave soldiers they lead?”

“In large part. But not the equal of Unsullied. Yunkai is known for training bed slaves, not warriors.”

“What say you? Can we defeat this army?”

“Easily,” Ser Jorah said.

“But not bloodlessly.” Blood aplenty had soaked into the bricks of Astapor the day that city fell, though little of it belonged to her or hers. “We might win a battle here, but at such cost we cannot take the city.”

“That is ever a risk, *Khaleesi*. Astapor was complacent and vulnerable. Yunkai is forewarned.”

Dany considered. The slaver host seemed small compared to her own numbers, but the sellswords were ahorse. She’d ridden too long with Dothraki not to have a healthy respect for what mounted warriors could do to foot. *The Unsullied could withstand their charge, but my freedmen will be slaughtered.* “The slavers like to talk,” she said. “Send word that I will hear them this evening in my tent. And invite the captains of the sellsword companies to call on me as well. But not together. The Stormcrows at midday, the Second Sons two hours later.”

“As you wish,” Ser Jorah said. “But if they do not come—”

“They’ll come. They will be curious to see the dragons and hear what I might have to say, and the clever ones will see it for a chance to gauge my strength.” She wheeled her silver mare about. “I’ll await them in my pavilion.”

Slate skies and brisk winds saw Dany back to her host. The deep ditch that would encircle her camp was already half dug, and the woods were full of Unsullied lopping branches off birch trees to sharpen into stakes. The eunuchs could not sleep in an unfortified camp, or so Grey Worm insisted. He was there watching the work. Dany halted a moment to speak with him. “Yunkai has girded up her loins for battle.”

“This is good, Your Grace. These ones thirst for blood.”

When she had commanded the Unsullied to choose officers from amongst themselves, Grey Worm had been their overwhelming choice for the highest rank. Dany had put Ser Jorah over him to train him for command, and the exile knight said that so far the young eunuch was hard but fair, quick to learn, tireless, and utterly unrelenting in his attention to detail.

“The Wise Masters have assembled a slave army to meet us.”

“A slave in Yunkai learns the way of seven sighs and the sixteen seats of pleasure, Your Grace. The Unsullied learn the way of the three spears. Your Grey Worm hopes to show you.”

One of the first things Dany had done after the fall of Astapor was abolish the custom of giving the Unsullied new slave names every day. Most of those born free had returned to their birth names; those who still remembered them, at least. Others had called themselves after heroes or gods, and sometimes weapons, gems, and even flowers, which resulted in soldiers with some very peculiar names, to Dany’s ears. Grey Worm had remained Grey Worm. When she asked him why, he said, “It is a lucky name. The name this one was born to was accursed. That was the name he had when he was taken for a slave. But Grey Worm is the name this one drew the day Daenerys Stormborn set him free.”

“If battle is joined, let Grey Worm show wisdom as well as valor,” Dany told him. “Spare any slave who runs or throws down his weapon. The fewer slain, the more remain to join us after.”

“This one will remember.”

“I know he will. Be at my tent by midday. I want you there with my other officers when I treat with the sellsword captains.” Dany spurred her silver on to camp.

Within the perimeter the Unsullied had established, the tents were going up in orderly rows, with her own tall golden pavilion at the center. A second encampment lay close beyond her own; five times the size, sprawling and chaotic, this second camp had no ditches, no tents, no sentries, no horselines. Those who had horses or mules slept beside them, for fear they might be stolen. Goats, sheep, and half-starved dogs wandered freely amongst hordes of women, children, and old men. Dany had left Astapor in the hands of a council of former slaves led by a healer, a scholar, and a priest. Wise men all, she thought, and just. Yet even so, tens of thousands preferred to follow her to Yunkai, rather than remain behind in Astapor. *I gave them the city, and most of them were too frightened to take it.*

The raggle-taggle host of freedmen dwarfed her own, but they were more burden than benefit. Perhaps one in a hundred had a donkey, a camel, or an ox; most carried weapons looted from some slaver’s armory, but only one in

ten was strong enough to fight, and none was trained. They ate the land bare as they passed, like locusts in sandals. Yet Dany could not bring herself to abandon them as Ser Jorah and her bloodriders urged. *I told them they were free. I cannot tell them now they are not free to join me.* She gazed at the smoke rising from their cookfires and swallowed a sigh. She might have the best footsoldiers in the world, but she also had the worst.

Arstan Whitebeard stood outside the entrance of her tent, while Strong Belwas sat crosslegged on the grass nearby, eating a bowl of figs. On the march, the duty of guarding her fell upon their shoulders. She had made Jhogo, Aggo, and Rakharo her *kos* as well as her bloodriders, and just now she needed them more to command her Dothraki than to protect her person. Her *khalasar* was tiny, some thirty-odd mounted warriors, and most of them braidless boys and bentback old men. Yet they were all the horse she had, and she dared not go without them. The Unsullied might be the finest infantry in all the world, as Ser Jorah claimed, but she needed scouts and outriders as well.

“Yunkai will have war,” Dany told Whitebeard inside the pavilion. Irri and Jhiqui had covered the floor with carpets while Missandei lit a stick of incense to sweeten the dusty air. Drogon and Rhaegal were asleep atop some cushions, curled about each other, but Viserion perched on the edge of her empty bath. “Missandei, what language will these Yunkai’i speak, Valyrian?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” the child said. “A different dialect than Astapor’s, yet close enough to understand. The slavers name themselves the Wise Masters.”

“Wise?” Dany sat crosslegged on a cushion, and Viserion spread his white-and-gold wings and flapped to her side. “We shall see how wise they are,” she said as she scratched the dragon’s scaly head behind the horns.

Ser Jorah Mormont returned an hour later, accompanied by three captains of the Stormcrows. They wore black feathers on their polished helms, and claimed to be all equal in honor and authority. Dany studied them as Irri and Jhiqui poured the wine. Prendahl na Ghezn was a thickset Ghiscari with a broad face and dark hair going grey; Sallor the Bald had a twisting scar across his pale Qartheen cheek; and Daario Naharis was flamboyant even

for a Tyroshi. His beard was cut into three prongs and dyed blue, the same color as his eyes and the curly hair that fell to his collar. His pointed mustachios were painted gold. His clothes were all shades of yellow; a foam of Myrish lace the color of butter spilled from his collar and cuffs, his doublet was sewn with brass medallions in the shape of dandelions, and ornamental goldwork crawled up his high leather boots to his thighs. Gloves of soft yellow suede were tucked into a belt of gilded rings, and his fingernails were enameled blue.

But it was Prendahl na Ghezn who spoke for the sellswords. "You would do well to take your rabble elsewhere," he said. "You took Astapor by treachery, but Yunkai shall not fall so easily."

"Five hundred of your Stormcrows against ten thousand of my Unsullied," said Dany. "I am only a young girl and do not understand the ways of war, yet these odds seem poor to me."

"The Stormcrows do not stand alone," said Prendahl.

"Stormcrows do not stand at all. They fly, at the first sign of thunder. Perhaps you should be flying now. I have heard that sellswords are notoriously unfaithful. What will it avail you to be staunch, when the Second Sons change sides?"

"That will not happen," Prendahl insisted, unmoved. "And if it did, it would not matter. The Second Sons are nothing. We fight beside the stalwart men of Yunkai."

"You fight beside bed-boys armed with spears." When she turned her head, the twin bells in her braid rang softly. "Once battle is joined, do not think to ask for quarter. Join me now, however, and you shall keep the gold the Yunkai'i paid you and claim a share of the plunder besides, with greater rewards later when I come into my kingdom. Fight for the Wise Masters, and your wages will be death. Do you imagine that Yunkai will open its gates when my Unsullied are butchering you beneath the walls?"

"Woman, you bray like an ass, and make no more sense."

"*Woman?*" She chuckled. "Is that meant to insult me? I would return the slap, if I took you for a man." Dany met his stare. "I am Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the Unburnt, Mother of Dragons, *khaleesi* to Drogo's riders, and queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros."

“What you are,” said Prendahl na Ghezn, “is a horselord’s whore. When we break you, I will breed you to my stallion.”

Strong Belwas drew his *arakh*. “Strong Belwas will give his ugly tongue to the little queen, if she likes.”

“No, Belwas. I have given these men my safe conduct.” She smiled. “Tell me this—are the Stormcrows slave or free?”

“We are a brotherhood of free men,” Sallor declared.

“Good.” Dany stood. “Go back and tell your brothers what I said, then. It may be that some of them would sooner sup on gold and glory than on death. I shall want your answer on the morrow.”

The Stormcrow captains rose in unison. “Our answer is no,” said Prendahl na Ghezn. His fellows followed him out of the tent . . . but Daario Naharis glanced back as he left, and inclined his head in polite farewell.

Two hours later the commander of the Second Sons arrived alone. He proved to be a towering Braavosi with pale green eyes and a bushy red-gold beard that reached nearly to his belt. His name was Mero, but he called himself the Titan’s Bastard.

Mero tossed down his wine straightaway, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and leered at Dany. “I believe I fucked your twin sister in a pleasure house back home. Or was it you?”

“I think not. I would remember a man of such magnificence, I have no doubt.”

“Yes, that is so. No woman has ever forgotten the Titan’s Bastard.” The Braavosi held out his cup to Jhiqui. “What say you take those clothes off and come sit on my lap? If you please me, I might bring the Second Sons over to your side.”

“If you bring the Second Sons over to my side, I might not have you gelded.”

The big man laughed. “Little girl, another woman once tried to geld me with her teeth. She has no teeth now, but my sword is as long and thick as ever. Shall I take it out and show you?”

“No need. After my eunuchs cut it off, I can examine it at my leisure.” Dany took a sip of wine. “It is true that I am only a young girl, and do not

know the ways of war. Explain to me how you propose to defeat ten thousand Unsullied with your five hundred. Innocent as I am, these odds seem poor to me.”

“The Second Sons have faced worse odds and won.”

“The Second Sons have faced worse odds and run. At Qohor, when the Three Thousand made their stand. Or do you deny it?”

“That was many and more years ago, before the Second Sons were led by the Titan’s Bastard.”

“So it is from you they get their courage?” Dany turned to Ser Jorah. “When the battle is joined, kill this one first.”

The exile knight smiled. “Gladly, Your Grace.”

“Of course,” she said to Mero, “you could run again. We will not stop you. Take your Yunkish gold and go.”

“Had you ever seen the Titan of Braavos, foolish girl, you would know that it has no tail to turn.”

“Then stay, and fight for me.”

“You are worth fighting for, it is true,” the Braavosi said, “and I would gladly let you kiss my sword, if I were free. But I have taken Yunkai’s coin and pledged my holy word.”

“Coins can be returned,” she said. “I will pay you as much and more. I have other cities to conquer, and a whole kingdom awaiting me half a world away. Serve me faithfully, and the Second Sons need never seek hire again.”

The Braavosi tugged on his thick red beard. “As much and more, and perhaps a kiss besides, eh? Or more than a kiss? For a man as magnificent as me?”

“Perhaps.”

“I will like the taste of your tongue, I think.”

She could sense Ser Jorah’s anger. *My black bear does not like this talk of kissing.* “Think on what I’ve said tonight. Can I have your answer on the morrow?”

“You can.” The Titan’s Bastard grinned. “Can I have a flagon of this fine wine to take back to my captains?”

“You may have a tun. It is from the cellars of the Good Masters of Astapor, and I have wagons full of it.”

“Then give me a wagon. A token of your good regard.”

“You have a big thirst.”

“I am big all over. And I have many brothers. The Titan’s Bastard does not drink alone, *Khaleesi*.”

“A wagon it is, if you promise to drink to my health.”

“Done!” he boomed. “And done, and done! Three toasts we’ll drink you, and bring you an answer when the sun comes up.”

But when Mero was gone, Arstan Whitebeard said, “That one has an evil reputation, even in Westeros. Do not be misled by his manner, Your Grace. He will drink three toasts to your health tonight, and rape you on the morrow.”

“The old man’s right for once,” Ser Jorah said. “The Second Sons are an old company, and not without valor, but under Mero they’ve turned near as bad as the Brave Companions. The man is as dangerous to his employers as to his foes. That’s why you find him out here. None of the Free Cities will hire him any longer.”

“It is not his reputation that I want, it’s his five hundred horse. What of the Stormcrows, is there any hope there?”

“No,” Ser Jorah said bluntly. “That Prendahl is Ghiscari by blood. Likely he had kin in Astapor.”

“A pity. Well, perhaps we will not need to fight. Let us wait and hear what the Yunkai’i have to say.”

The envoys from Yunkai arrived as the sun was going down; fifty men on magnificent black horses and one on a great white camel. Their helms were twice as tall as their heads, so as not to crush the bizarre twists and towers and shapes of their oiled hair beneath. They dyed their linen skirts and tunics a deep yellow, and sewed copper disks to their cloaks.

The man on the white camel named himself Grazdan mo Eraz. Lean and hard, he had a white smile such as Kraznys had worn until Drogon burned off his face. His hair was drawn up in a unicorn's horn that jutted from his brow, and his *tokar* was fringed with golden Myrish lace. "Ancient and glorious is Yunkai, the queen of cities," he said when Dany welcomed him to her tent. "Our walls are strong, our nobles proud and fierce, our common folk without fear. Ours is the blood of ancient Ghis, whose empire was old when Valyria was yet a squalling child. You were wise to sit and speak, *Khaleesi*. You shall find no easy conquest here."

"Good. My Unsullied will relish a bit of a fight." She looked to Grey Worm, who nodded.

Grazdan shrugged expansively. "If blood is what you wish, let it flow. I am told you have freed your eunuchs. Freedom means as much to an Unsullied as a hat to a haddock." He smiled at Grey Worm, but the eunuch might have been made of stone. "Those who survive we shall enslave again, and use to retake Astapor from the rabble. We can make a slave of you as well, do not doubt it. There are pleasure houses in Lys and Tyrosh where men would pay handsomely to bed the last Targaryen."

"It is good to see you know who I am," said Dany mildly.

"I pride myself on my knowledge of the savage senseless west." Grazdan spread his hands, a gesture of conciliation. "And yet, why should we speak thus harshly to one another? It is true that you committed savageries in Astapor, but we Yunkai'i are a most forgiving people. Your quarrel is not with us, Your Grace. Why squander your strength against our mighty walls when you will need every man to regain your father's throne in far Westeros? Yunkai wishes you only well in that endeavor. And to prove the truth of that, I have brought you a gift." He clapped his hands, and two of his escort came forward bearing a heavy cedar chest bound in bronze and gold. They set it at her feet. "Fifty thousand golden marks," Grazdan said smoothly. "Yours, as a gesture of friendship from the Wise Masters of Yunkai. Gold given freely is better than plunder bought with blood, surely? So I say to you, Daenerys Targaryen, take this chest, and go."

Dany pushed open the lid of the chest with a small slippered foot. It was full of gold coins, just as the envoy said. She grabbed a handful and let

them run through her fingers. They shone brightly as they tumbled and fell; new minted, most of them, stamped with a stepped pyramid on one face and the harpy of Ghis on the other. “Very pretty. I wonder how many chests like this I shall find when I take your city?”

He chuckled. “None, for that you shall never do.”

“I have a gift for you as well.” She slammed the chest shut. “Three days. On the morning of the third day, send out your slaves. All of them. Every man, woman, and child shall be given a weapon, and as much food, clothing, coin, and goods as he or she can carry. These they shall be allowed to choose freely from among their masters’ possessions, as payment for their years of servitude. When all the slaves have departed, you will open your gates and allow my Unsullied to enter and search your city, to make certain none remain in bondage. If you do this, Yunkai will not be burned or plundered, and none of your people shall be molested. The Wise Masters will have the peace they desire, and will have proved themselves wise indeed. What say you?”

“I say, you are mad.”

“Am I?” Dany shrugged, and said, “*Dracarys*.”

The dragons answered. Rhaegal *hissed* and smoked, Viserion snapped, and Drogon spat swirling red-black flame. It touched the drape of Grazdan’s *tokar*, and the silk caught in half a heartbeat. Golden marks spilled across the carpets as the envoy stumbled over the chest, shouting curses and beating at his arm until Whitebeard flung a flagon of water over him to douse the flames. “You swore I should have safe conduct!” the Yunkish envoy wailed.

“Do all the Yunkai’i whine so over a singed *tokar*? I shall buy you a new one . . . if you deliver up your slaves within three days. Elsewise, Drogon shall give you a warmer kiss.” She wrinkled her nose. “You’ve soiled yourself. Take your gold and go, and see that the Wise Masters hear my message.”

Grazdan mo Eraz pointed a finger. “You shall rue this arrogance, whore. These little lizards will not keep you safe, I promise you. We will fill the air with arrows if they come within a league of Yunkai. Do you think it is so hard to kill a dragon?”

“Harder than to kill a slaver. Three days, Grazdan. Tell them. By the end of the third day, I will be in Yunkai, whether you open your gates for me or no.”

Full dark had fallen by the time the Yunkai'i departed from her camp. It promised to be a gloomy night; moonless, starless, with a chill wet wind blowing from the west. *A fine black night*, thought Dany. The fires burned all around her, small orange stars strewn across hill and field. “Ser Jorah,” she said, “summon my bloodriders.” Dany seated herself on a mound of cushions to await them, her dragons all about her. When they were assembled, she said, “An hour past midnight should be time enough.”

“Yes, *Khaleesi*,” said Rakharo. “Time for what?”

“To mount our attack.”

Ser Jorah Mormont scowled. “You told the sellswords—”

“—that I wanted their answers on the morrow. I made no promises about tonight. The Stormcrows will be arguing about my offer. The Second Sons will be drunk on the wine I gave Mero. And the Yunkai'i believe they have three days. We will take them under cover of this darkness.”

“They will have scouts watching for us.”

“And in the dark, they will see hundreds of campfires burning,” said Dany. “If they see anything at all.”

“*Khaleesi*,” said Jhogo, “I will deal with these scouts. They are no riders, only slavers on horses.”

“Just so,” she agreed. “I think we should attack from three sides. Grey Worm, your Unsullied shall strike at them from right and left, while my *kos* lead my horse in wedge for a thrust through their center. Slave soldiers will never stand before mounted Dothraki.” She smiled. “To be sure, I am only a young girl and know little of war. What do you think, my lords?”

“I think you are Rhaegar Targaryen's sister,” Ser Jorah said with a rueful half smile.

“Aye,” said Arstan Whitebeard, “and a queen as well.”

It took an hour to work out all the details. *Now begins the most dangerous time*, Dany thought as her captains departed to their commands.

She could only pray that the gloom of the night would hide her preparations from the foe.

Near midnight, she got a scare when Ser Jorah bulled his way past Strong Belwas. “The Unsullied caught one of the sellswords trying to sneak into the camp.”

“A spy?” That frightened her. If they’d caught one, how many others might have gotten away?

“He claims to come bearing gifts. It’s the yellow fool with the blue hair.”

Daario Naharis. “That one. I’ll hear him, then.”

When the exile knight delivered him, she asked herself whether two men had ever been so different. The Tyroshi was fair where Ser Jorah was swarthy; lithe where the knight was brawny; graced with flowing locks where the other was balding, yet smooth-skinned where Mormont was hairy. And her knight dressed plainly while this other made a peacock look drab, though he had thrown a heavy black cloak over his bright yellow finery for this visit. He carried a heavy canvas sack slung over one shoulder.

“*Khaleesi*,” he cried, “I bring gifts and glad tidings. The Stormcrows are yours.” A golden tooth gleamed in his mouth when he smiled. “And so is Daario Naharis!”

Dany was dubious. If this Tyroshi had come to spy, this declaration might be no more than a desperate plot to save his head. “What do Prendahl na Ghezn and Sallor say of this?”

“Little.” Daario upended the sack, and the heads of Sallor the Bald and Prendahl na Ghezn spilled out upon her carpets. “My gifts to the dragon queen.”

Viserion sniffed the blood leaking from Prendahl’s neck, and let loose a gout of flame that took the dead man full in the face, blackening and blistering his bloodless cheeks. Drogon and Rhaegal stirred at the smell of roasted meat.

“You did this?” Dany asked queasily.

“None other.” If her dragons discomfited Daario Naharis, he hid it well. For all the mind he paid them, they might have been three kittens playing with a mouse.

“Why?”

“Because you are so beautiful.” His hands were large and strong, and there was something in his hard blue eyes and great curving nose that suggested the fierceness of some splendid bird of prey. “Prendahl talked too much and said too little.” His garb, rich as it was, had seen hard wear; salt stains patterned his boots, the enamel of his nails was chipped, his lace was soiled by sweat, and she could see where the end of his cloak was fraying. “And Sallor picked his nose as if his snot was gold.” He stood with his hands crossed at the wrists, his palms resting on the pommels of his blades; a curving Dothraki *arakh* on his left hip, a Myrish stiletto on his right. Their hilts were a matched pair of golden women, naked and wanton.

“Are you skilled in the use of those handsome blades?” Dany asked him.

“Prendahl and Sallor would tell you so, if dead men could talk. I count no day as lived unless I have loved a woman, slain a foeman, and eaten a fine meal . . . and the days that I have lived are as numberless as the stars in the sky. I make of slaughter a thing of beauty, and many a tumbler and fire dancer has wept to the gods that they might be half so quick, a quarter so graceful. I would tell you the names of all the men I have slain, but before I could finish your dragons would grow large as castles, the walls of Yunkai would crumble into yellow dust, and winter would come and go and come again.”

Dany laughed. She liked the swagger she saw in this Daario Naharis. “Draw your sword and swear it to my service.”

In a blink, Daario’s *arakh* was free of its sheath. His submission was as outrageous as the rest of him, a great swoop that brought his face down to her toes. “My sword is yours. My life is yours. My love is yours. My blood, my body, my songs, you own them all. I live and die at your command, fair queen.”

“Then live,” Dany said, “and fight for me tonight.”

“That would not be wise, my queen.” Ser Jorah gave Daario a cold, hard stare. “Keep this one here under guard until the battle’s fought and won.”

She considered a moment, then shook her head. “If he can give us the Stormcrows, surprise is certain.”

“And if he betrays you, surprise is lost.”

Dany looked down at the sellsword again. He gave her such a smile that she flushed and turned away. “He won’t.”

“How can you know that?”

She pointed to the lumps of blackened flesh the dragons were consuming, bite by bloody bite. “I would call that proof of his sincerity. Daario Naharis, have your Stormcrows ready to strike the Yunkish rear when my attack begins. Can you get back safely?”

“If they stop me, I will say I have been scouting, and saw nothing.” The Tyroshi rose to his feet, bowed, and swept out.

Ser Jorah Mormont lingered. “Your Grace,” he said, too bluntly, “that was a mistake. We know nothing of this man—”

“We know that he is a great fighter.”

“A great talker, you mean.”

“He brings us the Stormcrows.” *And he has blue eyes.*

“Five hundred sellswords of uncertain loyalty.”

“All loyalties are uncertain in such times as these,” Dany reminded him. *And I shall be betrayed twice more, once for gold and once for love.*

“Daenerys, I am thrice your age,” Ser Jorah said. “I have seen how false men are. Very few are worthy of trust, and Daario Naharis is not one of them. Even his beard wears false colors.”

That angered her. “Whilst you have an honest beard, is that what you are telling me? You are the only man I should ever trust?”

He stiffened. “I did not say that.”

“You say it every day. Pyat Pree’s a liar, Xaro’s a schemer, Belwas a braggart, Arstan an assassin . . . do you think I’m still some virgin girl, that I cannot hear the words behind the words?”

“Your Grace—”

She bulled over him. “You have been a better friend to me than any I have known, a better brother than Viserys ever was. You are the first of my Queensguard, the commander of my army, my most valued counselor, my good right hand. I honor and respect and cherish you—but I do not desire

you, Jorah Mormont, and I am weary of your trying to push every other man in the world away from me, so I must needs rely on you and you alone. It will not serve, and it will not make me love you any better.”

Mormont had flushed red when she first began, but by the time Dany was done his face was pale again. He stood still as stone. “If my queen commands,” he said, curt and cold.

Dany was warm enough for both of them. “She does,” she said. “She *commands*. Now go see to your Unsullied, ser. You have a battle to fight and win.”

When he was gone, Dany threw herself down on her pillows beside her dragons. She had not meant to be so sharp with Ser Jorah, but his endless suspicion had finally woken her dragon.

He will forgive me, she told herself. *I am his liege*. Dany found herself wondering whether he was right about Daario. She felt very lonely all of a sudden. Mirri Maz Duur had promised that she would never bear a living child. *House Targaryen will end with me*. That made her sad. “You must be my children,” she told the dragons, “my three fierce children. Arstan says dragons live longer than men, so you will go on after I am dead.”

Drogon looped his neck around to nip at her hand. His teeth were very sharp, but he never broke her skin when they played like this. Dany laughed, and rolled him back and forth until he roared, his tail lashing like a whip. *It is longer than it was*, she saw, *and tomorrow it will be longer still*. *They grow quickly now, and when they are grown I shall have my wings*. Mounted on a dragon, she could lead her own men into battle, as she had in Astapor, but as yet they were still too small to bear her weight.

A stillness settled over her camp when midnight came and went. Dany remained in her pavilion with her maids, while Arstan Whitebeard and Strong Belwas kept the guard. *The waiting is the hardest part*. To sit in her tent with idle hands while her battle was being fought without her made Dany feel half a child again.

The hours crept by on turtle feet. Even after Jhiqui rubbed the knots from her shoulders, Dany was too restless for sleep. Missandei offered to sing her a lullaby of the Peaceful People, but Dany shook her head. “Bring me Arstan,” she said.

When the old man came, she was curled up inside her *hrakkar* pelt, whose musty smell still reminded her of Drogo. “I cannot sleep when men are dying for me, Whitebeard,” she said. “Tell me more of my brother Rhaegar, if you would. I liked the tale you told me on the ship, of how he decided that he must be a warrior.”

“Your Grace is kind to say so.”

“Viserys said that our brother won many tourneys.”

Arstan bowed his white head respectfully. “It is not meet for me to deny His Grace’s words . . .”

“But?” said Dany sharply. “Tell me. I command it.”

“Prince Rhaegar’s prowess was unquestioned, but he seldom entered the lists. He never loved the song of swords the way that Robert did, or Jaime Lannister. It was something he had to do, a task the world had set him. He did it well, for he did everything well. That was his nature. But he took no joy in it. Men said that he loved his harp much better than his lance.”

“He won *some* tourneys, surely,” said Dany, disappointed.

“When he was young, His Grace rode brilliantly in a tourney at Storm’s End, defeating Lord Steffon Baratheon, Lord Jason Mallister, the Red Viper of Dorne, and a mystery knight who proved to be the infamous Simon Toyne, chief of the kingswood outlaws. He broke twelve lances against Ser Arthur Dayne that day.”

“Was he the champion, then?”

“No, Your Grace. That honor went to another knight of the Kingsguard, who unhorsed Prince Rhaegar in the final tilt.”

Dany did not want to hear about Rhaegar being unhorsed. “But what tourneys did my brother *win*?”

“Your Grace.” The old man hesitated. “He won the greatest tourney of them all.”

“Which was that?” Dany demanded.

“The tourney Lord Whent staged at Harrenhal beside the Gods Eye, in the year of the false spring. A notable event. Besides the jousting, there was a *mêlée* in the old style fought between seven teams of knights, as well as

archery and axe-throwing, a horse race, a tournament of singers, a mummer show, and many feasts and frolics. Lord Whent was as open handed as he was rich. The lavish purses he proclaimed drew hundreds of challengers. Even your royal father came to Harrenhal, when he had not left the Red Keep for long years. The greatest lords and mightiest champions of the Seven Kingdoms rode in that tourney, and the Prince of Dragonstone bested them all.”

“But that was the tourney when he crowned Lyanna Stark as queen of love and beauty!” said Dany. “Princess Elia was there, his wife, and yet my brother gave the crown to the Stark girl, and later stole her away from her betrothed. How could he do that? Did the Dornish woman treat him so ill?”

“It is not for such as me to say what might have been in your brother’s heart, Your Grace. The Princess Elia was a good and gracious lady, though her health was ever delicate.”

Dany pulled the lion pelt tighter about her shoulders. “Viserys said once that it was my fault, for being born too late.” She had denied it hotly, she remembered, going so far as to tell Viserys that it was his fault for not being born a girl. He beat her cruelly for that insolence. “If I had been born more timely, he said, Rhaegar would have married me instead of Elia, and it would all have come out different. If Rhaegar had been happy in his wife, he would not have needed the Stark girl.”

“Perhaps so, Your Grace.” Whitebeard paused a moment. “But I am not certain it was in Rhaegar to be happy.”

“You make him sound so sour,” Dany protested.

“Not sour, no, but . . . there was a melancholy to Prince Rhaegar, a sense . . .” The old man hesitated again.

“Say it,” she urged. “A sense . . . ?”

“. . . of doom. He was born in grief, my queen, and that shadow hung over him all his days.”

Viserys had spoken of Rhaegar’s birth only once. Perhaps the tale saddened him too much. “It was the shadow of Summerhall that haunted him, was it not?”

“Yes. And yet Summerhall was the place the prince loved best. He would go there from time to time, with only his harp for company. Even the knights of the Kingsguard did not attend him there. He liked to sleep in the ruined hall, beneath the moon and stars, and whenever he came back he would bring a song. When you heard him play his high harp with the silver strings and sing of twilights and tears and the death of kings, you could not but feel that he was singing of himself and those he loved.”

“What of the Usurper? Did he play sad songs as well?”

Arstan chuckled. “Robert? Robert liked songs that made him laugh, the bawdier the better. He only sang when he was drunk, and then it was like to be ‘A Cask of Ale’ or ‘Fifty-Four Tuns’ or ‘The Bear and the Maiden Fair.’ Robert was much—”

As one, her dragons lifted their heads and roared.

“Horses!” Dany leapt to her feet, clutching the lion pelt. Outside, she heard Strong Belwas bellow something, and then other voices, and the sounds of many horses. “Irri, go see who . . .”

The tent flap pushed open, and Ser Jorah Mormont entered. He was dusty, and spattered with blood, but otherwise none the worse for battle. The exile knight went to one knee before Dany and said, “Your Grace, I bring you victory. The Stormcrows turned their cloaks, the slaves broke, and the Second Sons were too drunk to fight, just as you said. Two hundred dead, Yunkai’i for the most part. Their slaves threw down their spears and ran, and their sellswords yielded. We have several thousand captives.”

“Our own losses?”

“A dozen. If that many.”

Only then did she allow herself to smile. “Rise, my good brave bear. Was Grazdan taken? Or the Titan’s Bastard?”

“Grazdan went to Yunkai to deliver your terms.” Ser Jorah got to his feet. “Mero fled, once he realized the Stormcrows had turned. I have men hunting him. He shouldn’t escape us long.”

“Very well,” Dany said. “Sellsword or slave, spare all those who will pledge me their faith. If enough of the Second Sons will join us, keep the company intact.”

The next day they marched the last three leagues to Yunkai. The city was built of yellow bricks instead of red; otherwise it was Astapor all over again, with the same crumbling walls and high stepped pyramids, and a great harpy mounted above its gates. The wall and towers swarmed with crossbowmen and slingers. Ser Jorah and Grey Worm deployed her men, Irri and Jhiqui raised her pavilion, and Dany sat down to wait.

On the morning of the third day, the city gates swung open and a line of slaves began to emerge. Dany mounted her silver to greet them. As they passed, little Missandei told them that they owed their freedom to Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros and Mother of Dragons.

“*Mhysa!*” a brown-skinned man shouted out at her. He had a child on his shoulder, a little girl, and she screamed the same word in her thin voice. “*Mhysa! Mhysa!*”

Dany looked at Missandei. “What are they shouting?”

“It is Ghiscari, the old pure tongue. It means ‘Mother.’”

Dany felt a lightness in her chest. *I will never bear a living child*, she remembered. Her hand trembled as she raised it. Perhaps she smiled. She must have, because the man grinned and shouted again, and others took up the cry. “*Mhysa!*” they called. “*Mhysa! MHYSA!*” They were all smiling at her, reaching for her, kneeling before her. “*Maela*,” some called her, while others cried “*Aelalla*” or “*Qathei*” or “*Tato*,” but whatever the tongue it all meant the same thing. *Mother. They are calling me Mother.*

The chant grew, spread, swelled. It swelled so loud that it frightened her horse, and the mare backed and shook her head and lashed her silver-grey tail. It swelled until it seemed to shake the yellow walls of Yunkai. More slaves were streaming from the gates every moment, and as they came they took up the call. They were running toward her now, pushing, stumbling, wanting to touch her hand, to stroke her horse’s mane, to kiss her feet. Her poor bloodriders could not keep them all away, and even Strong Belwas grunted and growled in dismay.

Ser Jorah urged her to go, but Dany remembered a dream she had dreamed in the House of the Undying. “They will not hurt me,” she told him. “They are my children, Jorah.” She laughed, put her heels into her

horse, and rode to them, the bells in her hair ringing sweet victory. She trotted, then cantered, then broke into a gallop, her braid streaming behind. The freed slaves parted before her. “Mother,” they called from a hundred throats, a thousand, ten thousand. “Mother,” they sang, their fingers brushing her legs as she flew by. “Mother, Mother, Mother!”