

THE WINDBLOWN

The word passed through the camp like a hot wind. *She is coming. Her host is on the march. She is racing south to Yunkai, to put the city to the torch and its people to the sword, and we are going north to meet her.*

Frog had it from Dick Straw who had it from Old Bill Bone who had it from a Pentoshi named Myrio Myrakis, who had a cousin who served as cupbearer to the Tattered Prince. “Coz heard it in the command tent, from Caggo’s own lips,” Dick Straw insisted. “We’ll march before the day is out, see if we don’t.”

That much proved true. The command came down from the Tattered Prince through his captains and his serjeants: strike the tents, load the mules, saddle the horses, we march for Yunkai at the break of day. “Not that them Yunkish bastards will be wanting us inside their Yellow City, sniffing round their daughters,” predicted Baqq, the squint-eyed Myrish crossbowman whose name meant *Beans*. “We’ll get provisions in Yunkai, maybe fresh horses, then it will be on to Meereen to dance with the dragon queen. So hop quick, Frog, and put a nice edge on your master’s sword. Might be he’ll need it soon.”

In Dorne Quentyn Martell had been a prince, in Volantis a merchant’s man, but on the shores of Slaver’s Bay he was only Frog, squire to the big bald Dornish knight the sellswords called Greenguts. The men of the Windblown used what names they would, and changed them at a whim. They’d fastened *Frog* on him because he hopped so fast when the big man shouted a command.

Even the commander of the Windblown kept his true name to himself. Some free companies had been born during the century of blood and chaos that had followed the Doom of Valyria. Others had been formed yesterday and would be gone upon the morrow. The Windblown went back thirty years, and had known but one commander, the soft-spoken, sad-eyed Pentoshi nobleman called the Tattered Prince. His hair and mail were silver-grey, but his ragged cloak was made of twists of cloth of many colors, blue

and grey and purple, red and gold and green, magenta and vermilion and cerulean, all faded by the sun. When the Tattered Prince was three-and-twenty, as Dick Straw told the story, the magisters of Pentos had chosen him to be their new prince, hours after beheading their old prince. Instead he'd buckled on a sword, mounted his favorite horse, and fled to the Disputed Lands, never to return. He had ridden with the Second Sons, the Iron Shields, and the Maiden's Men, then joined with five brothers-in-arms to form the Windblown. Of those six founders, only he survived.

Frog had no notion whether any of that was true. Since signing into the Windblown in Volantis, he had seen the Tattered Prince only at a distance. The Dornishmen were new hands, raw recruits, arrow fodder, three amongst two thousand. Their commander kept more elevated company. "I am not a squire," Quentyn had protested when Gerris Drinkwater—known here as Dornish Gerrold, to distinguish him from Gerrold Redback and Black Gerrold, and sometimes as Drink, since the big man had slipped and called him that—suggested the ruse. "I earned my spurs in Dorne. I am as much a knight as you are."

But Gerris had the right of it; he and Arch were here to protect Quentyn, and that meant keeping him by the big man's side. "Arch is the best fighter of the three of us," Drinkwater had pointed out, "but only you can hope to wed the dragon queen."

Wed her or fight her; either way, I will face her soon. The more Quentyn heard of Daenerys Targaryen, the more he feared that meeting. The Yunkai'i claimed that she fed her dragons on human flesh and bathed in the blood of virgins to keep her skin smooth and supple. Beans laughed at that but relished the tales of the silver queen's promiscuity. "One of her captains comes of a line where the men have foot-long members," he told them, "but even he's not big enough for her. She rode with the Dothraki and grew accustomed to being fucked by stallions, so now no man can fill her." And Books, the clever Volantene swordsman who always seemed to have his nose poked in some crumbly scroll, thought the dragon queen both murderous and mad. "Her khal killed her brother to make her queen. Then she killed her khal to make herself *khaleesi*. She practices blood sacrifice, lies as easily as she breathes, turns against her own on a whim. She's

broken truces, tortured envoys ... her father was mad too. It runs in the blood.”

It runs in the blood. King Aerys II *had* been mad, all of Westeros knew that. He had exiled two of his Hands and burned a third. *If Daenerys is as murderous as her father, must I still marry her?* Prince Doran had never spoken of that possibility.

Frog would be glad to put Astapor behind him. The Red City was the closest thing to hell he ever hoped to know. The Yunkai'i had sealed the broken gates to keep the dead and dying inside the city, but the sights that he had seen riding down those red brick streets would haunt Quentyn Martell forever. A river choked with corpses. The priestess in her torn robes, impaled upon a stake and attended by a cloud of glistening green flies. Dying men staggering through the streets, bloody and befouled. Children fighting over half-cooked puppies. The last free king of Astapor, screaming naked in the pit as he was set on by a score of starving dogs. And fires, fires everywhere. He could close his eyes and see them still: flames whirling from brick pyramids larger than any castle he had ever seen, plumes of greasy smoke coiling upward like great black snakes.

When the wind blew from the south, the air smelled of smoke even here, three miles from the city. Behind its crumbling red brick walls, Astapor was still as molder, though by now most of the great fires had burned out. Ashes floated lazy on the breeze like fat grey snowflakes. It would be good to go.

The big man agreed. “Past time,” he said, when Frog found him dicing with Beans and Books and Old Bill Bone, and losing yet again. The sellswords loved Greenguts, who bet as fearlessly as he fought, but with far less success. “I’ll want my armor, Frog. Did you scrub that blood off my mail?”

“Aye, ser.” Greenguts’s mail was old and heavy, patched and patched again, much worn. The same was true of his helm, his gorget, greaves, and gauntlets, and the rest of his mismatched plate. Frog’s kit was only slightly better, and Ser Gerris’s was notably worse. *Company steel*, the armorer had called it. Quentyn had not asked how many other men had worn it before him, how many men had died in it. They had abandoned their own fine armor in Volantis, along with their gold and their true names. Wealthy

knights from Houses old in honor did not cross the narrow sea to sell their swords, unless exiled for some infamy. “I’d sooner pose as poor than evil,” Quentyn had declared, when Gerris had explained his ruse to them.

It took the Windblown less than an hour to strike their camp. “And now we ride,” the Tattered Prince proclaimed from his huge grey war-horse, in a classic High Valyrian that was the closest thing they had to a company tongue. His stallion’s spotted hindquarters were covered with ragged strips of cloth torn from the surcoats of men his master had slain. The prince’s cloak was sewn together from more of the same. An old man he was, past sixty, yet he still sat straight and tall in the high saddle, and his voice was strong enough to carry to every corner of the field. “Astapor was but a taste,” he said, “Meereen will be the feast,” and the sellswords sent up a wild cheer. Streamers of pale blue silk fluttered from their lances, whilst fork-tailed blue-and-white banners flew overhead, the standards of the Windblown.

The three Dornishmen cheered with all the rest. Silence would have drawn notice. But as the Windblown rode north along the coast road, close behind Bloodbeard and the Company of the Cat, Frog fell in beside Dornish Gerrold. “Soon,” he said, in the Common Tongue of Westeros. There were other Westerosi in the company, but not many, and not near. “We need to do it soon.”

“Not here,” warned Gerris, with a mummer’s empty smile. “We’ll speak of this tonight, when we make camp.”

It was a hundred leagues from Astapor to Yunkai by the old Ghiscari coast road, and another fifty from Yunkai to Meereen. The free companies, well mounted, could reach Yunkai in six days of hard riding, or eight at a more leisurely pace. The legions from Old Ghis would take half again as long, marching afoot, and the Yunkai’i and their slave soldiers ... “With their generals, it’s a wonder they don’t march into the sea,” Beans said.

The Yunkai’i did not lack for commanders. An old hero named Yurkhaz zo Yunzak had the supreme command, though the men of the Windblown glimpsed him only at a distance, coming and going in a palanquin so huge it required forty slaves to carry it.

They could not help but see his underlings, however. The Yunkish lordlings scuttled everywhere, like roaches. Half of them seemed to be named Ghazdan, Grazdan, Mazdhan, or Ghaznak; telling one Ghiscari name from another was an art few of the Windblown had mastered, so they gave them mocking styles of their own devising.

Foremost amongst them was the Yellow Whale, an obscenely fat man who always wore yellow silk *tokars* with golden fringes. Too heavy even to stand unassisted, he could not hold his water, so he always smelled of piss, a stench so sharp that even heavy perfumes could not conceal it. But he was said to be the richest man in Yunkai, and he had a passion for grotesques; his slaves included a boy with the legs and hooves of a goat, a bearded woman, a two-headed monster from Mantarys, and a hermaphrodite who warmed his bed at night. “Cock and cunny both,” Dick Straw told them. “The Whale used to own a giant too, liked to watch him fuck his slave girls. Then he died. I hear the Whale’d give a sack o’ gold for a new one.”

Then there was the Girl General, who rode about on a white horse with a red mane and commanded a hundred strapping slave soldiers that she had bred and trained herself, all of them young, lean, rippling with muscle, and naked but for breechclouts, yellow cloaks, and long bronze shields with erotic inlays. Their mistress could not have been more than sixteen and fancied herself Yunkai’s own Daenerys Targaryen.

The Little Pigeon was not quite a dwarf, but he might have passed for one in a bad light. Yet he strutted about as if he were a giant, with his plump little legs spread wide and his plump little chest puffed out. His soldiers were the tallest that any of the Windblown had ever seen; the shortest stood seven feet tall, the tallest close to eight. All were long-faced and long-legged, and the stilts built into the legs of their ornate armor made them longer still. Pink-enameled scales covered their torsos; on their heads were perched elongated helms complete with pointed steel beaks and crests of bobbing pink feathers. Each man wore a long curved sword upon his hip, and each clasped a spear as tall as he was, with a leaf-shaped blade at either end.

“The Little Pigeon breeds them,” Dick Straw informed them. “He buys tall slaves from all over the world, mates the men to the women, and keeps their

tallest offspring for the Herons. One day he hopes to be able to dispense with the stilts.”

“A few sessions on the rack might speed along the process,” suggested the big man.

Gerris Drinkwater laughed. “A fearsome lot. Nothing scares me worse than stilt-walkers in pink scales and feathers. If one was after me, I’d laugh so hard my bladder might let go.”

“Some say that herons are majestic,” said Old Bill Bone. “If your king eats frogs while standing on one leg.”

“Hérons are craven,” the big man put in. “One time me and Drink and Cletus were hunting, and we came on these herons wading in the shallows, feasting on tadpoles and small fish. They made a pretty sight, aye, but then a hawk passed overhead, and they all took to the wing like they’d seen a dragon. Kicked up so much wind it blew me off my horse, but Cletus knocked an arrow to his string and brought one down. Tasted like duck, but not so greasy.”

Even the Little Pigeon and his Herons paled beside the folly of the brothers the sellswords called the Clanker Lords. The last time the slave soldiers of Yunkai’i had faced the dragon queen’s Unsullied, they broke and ran. The Clanker Lords had devised a stratagem to prevent that; they chained their troops together in groups of ten, wrist to wrist and ankle to ankle. “None of the poor bastards can run unless they all run,” Dick Straw explained, laughing. “And if they do all run, they won’t run very fast.”

“They don’t fucking march very fast either,” observed Beans. “You can hear them clanking ten leagues off.”

There were more, near as mad or worse: Lord Wobblecheeks, the Drunken Conqueror, the Beastmaster, Pudding Face, the Rabbit, the Charioteer, the Perfumed Hero. Some had twenty soldiers, some two hundred or two thousand, all slaves they had trained and equipped themselves. Every one was wealthy, every one was arrogant, and every one was a captain and commander, answerable to no one but Yurkhaz zo Yunzak, disdainful of

mere sellswords, and prone to squabbles over precedence that were as endless as they were incomprehensible.

In the time it took the Windblown to ride three miles, the Yunkai'i had fallen two-and-a-half miles behind. "A pack of stinking yellow fools," Beans complained. "They still ain't managed to puzzle out why the Stormcrows and the Second Sons went over to the dragon queen."

"For gold, they believe," said Books. "Why do you think they're paying us so well?"

"Gold is sweet, but life is sweeter," said Beans. "We were dancing with cripples at Astapor. Do you want to face real Unsullied with that lot on your side?"

"We fought the Unsullied at Astapor," the big man said. "I said *real* Unsullied. Hacking off some boy's stones with a butcher's cleaver and handing him a pointy hat don't make him Unsullied. That dragon queen's got the real item, the kind that don't break and run when you fart in their general direction."

"Them, and dragons too." Dick Straw glanced up at the sky as if he thought the mere mention of dragons might be enough to bring them down upon the company. "Keep your swords sharp, boys, we'll have us a real fight soon."

A real fight, thought Frog. The words stuck in his craw. The fight beneath the walls of Astapor had seemed real enough to him, though he knew the sellswords felt otherwise. "That was butchery, not battle," the warrior bard Denzo D'han had been heard to declare afterward. Denzo was a captain, and veteran of a hundred battles. Frog's experience was limited to practice yard and tourney ground, so he did not think it was his place to dispute the verdict of such a seasoned warrior.

It seemed like a battle when it first began, though. He remembered how his gut had clenched when he was kicked awake at dawn with the big man looming over him. "Into your armor, slugabed," he'd boomed. "The Butcher's coming out to give us battle. Up, unless you mean to be his meat."

“The Butcher King is dead,” Frog had protested sleepily. That was the story all of them had heard as they scrambled from the ships that had brought them from Old Volantis. A second King Cleon had taken the crown and died in turn, supposedly, and now the Astapori were ruled by a whore and a mad barber whose followers were fighting with each other to control the city.

“Maybe they lied,” the big man had replied. “Or else this is some other butcher. Might be the first one come back screaming from his tomb to kill some Yunkishmen. Makes no bloody matter, Frog. *Get your armor on.*” The tent slept ten, and all of them had been on their feet by then, wriggling into breeches and boots, sliding long coats of ringmail down onto their shoulders, buckling breastplates, tightening the straps on greaves or vambraces, grabbing for helms and shields and sword belts. Gerris, quick as ever, was the first one fully clad, Arch close behind him. Together they helped Quentyn don his own harness.

Three hundred yards away, Astapor’s new Unsullied had been pouring through their gates and forming up in ranks beneath their city’s crumbling red brick walls, dawn light glinting off their spiked bronze helmets and the points of their long spears.

The three Dornishmen spilled from the tent together to join the fighters sprinting for the horse lines. *Battle.* Quentyn had trained with spear and sword and shield since he was old enough to walk, but that meant nothing now. *Warrior, make me brave,* Frog had prayed, as drums beat in the distance, *BOOM boom BOOM boom BOOM boom.* The big man pointed out the Butcher King to him, sitting stiff and tall upon an armored horse in a suit of copper scale that flashed brilliantly in the morning sun. He remembered Gerris sidling up just before the fight began. “Stay close to Arch, whatever happens. Remember, you’re the only one of us who can get the girl.” By then the Astapori were advancing.

Dead or alive, the Butcher King still took the Wise Masters unawares. The Yunkishmen were still running about in fluttering *tokars* trying to get their half-trained slave soldiers into some semblance of order as Unsullied spears came crashing through their siege lines. If not for their allies and their despised hirelings they might well have been overwhelmed, but the

Windblown and the Company of the Cat were a-horse in minutes and came thundering down on the Astapori flanks even as a legion from New Ghis pushed through the Yunkish camp from the other side and met the Unsullied spear to spear and shield to shield.

The rest was butchery, but this time it was the Butcher King on the wrong end of the cleaver. Caggo was the one who finally cut him down, fighting through the king's protectors on his monstrous warhorse and opening Cleon the Great from shoulder to hip with one blow of his curved Valyrian *arakh*. Frog did not see it, but those who did claimed Cleon's copper armor rent like silk, and from within came an awful stench and a hundred wriggling grave worms. Cleon had been dead after all. The desperate Astapori had pulled him from his tomb, clapped him into armor, and tied him onto a horse in hopes of giving heart to their Unsullied.

Dead Cleon's fall wrote an end to that. The new Unsullied threw down their spears and shields and ran, only to find the gates of Astapor shut behind them. Frog had done his part in the slaughter that followed, riding down the frightened eunuchs with the other Windblown. Hard by the big man's hip he rode, slashing right and left as their wedge went through the Unsullied like a spearpoint. When they burst through on the other side, the Tattered Prince had wheeled them round and led them through again. It was only coming back that Frog got a good look at the faces beneath the spiked bronze caps and realized that most were no older than he. *Green boys screaming for their mothers*, he'd thought, but he killed them all the same. By the time he'd left the field, his sword was running red with blood and his arm was so tired he could hardly lift it.

Yet that was no real fight, he thought. *The real fight will be on us soon, and we must be away before it comes, or we'll find ourselves fighting on the wrong side.*

That night the Windblown made camp beside the shore of Slaver's Bay. Frog drew the first watch and was sent to guard the horse lines. Gerris met him there just after sundown, as a half-moon shone upon the waters.

"The big man should be here as well," said Quentyn. "He's gone to look up Old Bill Bone and lose the rest of his silver," Gerris said. "Leave him out of

this. He'll do as we say, though he won't like it much."

"No." There was much and more about this Quentyn did not like himself. Sailing on an overcrowded ship tossed by wind and sea, eating hard-bread crawling with weevils and drinking black tar rum to sweet oblivion, sleeping on piles of moldy straw with the stench of strangers in his nostrils ... all that he had expected when he made his mark on that scrap of parchment in Volantis, pledging the Tattered Prince his sword and service for a year. Those were hardships to be endured, the stuff of all adventures.

But what must come next was plain betrayal. The Yunkai'i had brought them from Old Volantis to fight for the Yellow City, but now the Dornishmen meant to turn their cloaks and go over to the other side. That meant abandoning their new brothers-in-arms as well. The Windblown were not the sort of companions Quentyn would have chosen, but he had crossed the sea with them, shared their meat and mead, fought beside them, traded tales with those few whose talk he understood. And if all his tales were lies, well, that was the cost of passage to Meereen.

It is not what you'd call honorable, Gerris had warned them, back at the Merchant's House.

"Daenerys may be halfway to Yunkai by now, with an army at her back," Quentyn said as they walked amongst the horses.

"She may be," Gerris said, "but she's not. We've heard such talk before. The Astapori were convinced Daenerys was coming south with her dragons to break the siege. She didn't come then, and she's not coming now."

"We can't know that, not for certain. We need to steal away before we end up fighting the woman I was sent to woo."

"Wait till Yunkai." Gerris gestured at the hills. "These lands belong to the Yunkai'i. No one is like to want to feed or shelter three deserters. North of Yunkai, that's no-man's-land."

He was not wrong. Even so, Quentyn felt uneasy. "The big man's made too many friends. He knows the plan was always to steal off and make our way

to Daenerys, but he's not going to feel good about abandoning men he's fought with. If we wait too long, it's going to feel as if we're deserting them on the eve of battle. He will never do that. You know him as well as I do."

"It's desertion whenever we do it," argued Gerris, "and the Tattered Prince takes a dim view of deserters. He'll send hunters after us, and Seven save us if they catch us. If we're lucky, they'll just chop off a foot to make sure we never run again. If we're unlucky, they'll give us to Pretty Meris."

That last gave Quentyn pause. Pretty Meris frightened him. A Westerosi woman, but taller than he was, just a thumb under six feet. After twenty years amongst the free companies, there was nothing pretty about her, inside or out.

Gerris took him by the arm. "Wait. A few more days, that's all. We have crossed half the world, be patient for a few more leagues. Somewhere north of Yunkai our chance will come."

"If you say," said Frog doubtfully ... but for once the gods were listening, and their chance came much sooner than that.

It was two days later. Hugh Hungerford reined up by their cookfire, and said, "Dornish. You're wanted in the command tent."

"Which one of us?" asked Gerris. "We're all Dornish."

"All of you, then." Sour and saturnine, with a maimed hand, Hungerford had been company paymaster for a time, until the Tattered Prince had caught him stealing from the coffers and removed three of his fingers. Now he was just a serjeant.

What could this be? Up to now, Frog had no notion that their commander knew he was alive. Hungerford had already ridden off, however, so there was no time for questions. All they could do was gather up the big man and report as ordered. "Admit to nothing and be prepared to fight," Quentyn told his friends.

"I am always prepared to fight," said the big man.

The great grey sailcloth pavilion that the Tattered Prince liked to call his canvas castle was crowded when the Dornishmen arrived. It took Quentyn only a moment to realize that most of those assembled were from the Seven Kingdoms, or boasted Westerosi blood. *Exiles or the sons of exiles*. Dick Straw claimed there were three score Westerosi in the company; a good third of those were here, including Dick himself, Hugh Hungerford, Pretty Meris, and golden-haired Lewis Lanster, the company's best archer.

Denzo D'han was there as well, with Caggo huge beside him. *Caggo Corpsekiller* the men were calling him now, though not to his face; he was quick to anger, and that curved black sword of his was as nasty as its owner. There were hundreds of Valyrian longswords in the world, but only a handful of Valyrian *arakhs*. Neither Caggo nor D'han was Westerosi, but both were captains and stood high in the Tattered Prince's regard. *His right arm and his left. Something major is afoot*.

It was the Tattered Prince himself who did the speaking. "Orders have come down from Yurkhaz," he said. "What Astapori still survive have come creeping from their hidey-holes, it seems. There's nothing left in Astapor but corpses, so they're pouring out into the countryside, hundreds of them, maybe thousands, all starved and sick. The Yunkai'i don't want them near their Yellow City. We've been commanded to hunt them down and turn them, drive them back to Astapor or north to Meereen. If the dragon queen wants to take them in, she's welcome to them. Half of them have the bloody flux, and even the healthy ones are mouths to feed."

"Yunkai is closer than Meereen," Hugh Hungerford objected. "What if they won't turn, my lord?"

"That's why you have swords and lances, Hugh. Though bows might serve you better. Stay well away from those who show signs of the flux. I'm sending half our strength into the hills. Fifty patrols, twenty riders each. Bloodbeard's got the same orders, so the Cats will be in the field as well."

A look passed between the men, and a few muttered under their breath. Though the Windblown and the Company of the Cat were both under contract to Yunkai, a year ago in the Disputed Lands they had been on opposite sides of the battle lines, and bad blood still lingered. Bloodbeard,

the savage commander of the Cats, was a roaring giant with a ferocious appetite for slaughter who made no secret of his disdain for “old grey-beards in rags.”

Dick Straw cleared his throat. “Begging your pardon, but we’re all Seven Kingdoms born here. M’lord never broke up the company by blood or tongue before. Why send us lot together?”

“A fair question. You’re to ride east, deep into the hills, then swing wide about Yunkai, making for Meereen. Should you come on any Astapori, drive them north or kill them ... but know that is not the purpose of your mission. Beyond the Yellow City, you’re like to come up against the dragon queen’s patrols. Second Sons or Stormcrows. Either will serve. Go over to them.”

“Go over to them?” said the bastard knight, Ser Orson Stone. “You’d have us turn our cloaks?”

“I would,” said the Tattered Prince.

Quentyn Martell almost laughed aloud. *The gods are mad.*

The Westerosi shifted uneasily. Some stared into their wine cups, as if they hoped to find some wisdom there. Hugh Hungerford frowned. “You think Queen Daenerys will take us in ...”

“I do.”

“... but if she does, what then? Are we spies? Assassins? *Envoys*? Are you thinking to change sides?”

Caggo scowled. “That is for the prince to decide, Hungerford. Your part is to do as you are told.”

“Always.” Hungerford raised his two-fingered hand. “Let us be frank,” said Denzo D’han, the warrior bard. “The Yunkai’i do not inspire confidence. Whatever the outcome of this war, the Wind-blown should share in the spoils of victory. Our prince is wise to keep all roads open.”

“Meris will command you,” said the Tattered Prince. “She knows my mind in this ... and Daenerys Targaryen may be more accepting of another woman.”

Quentyn glanced back to Pretty Meris. When her cold dead eyes met his, he felt a shiver. *I do not like this.*

Dick Straw still had doubts as well. “The girl would be a fool to trust us. Even with Meris. *Especially* with Meris. Hell, *I* don’t trust Meris, and I’ve fucked her a few times.” He grinned, but no one laughed. Least of all Pretty Meris.

“I think you are mistaken, Dick,” the Tattered Prince said. “You are all Westerosi. Friends from home. You speak her same tongue, worship her same gods. As for motive, all of you have suffered wrongs at my hands. Dick, I’ve whipped you more than any man in the company, and you have the back to prove it. Hugh lost three fingers to my discipline. Meris was raped half round the company. Not *this* company, true, but we need not mention that. Will of the Woods, well, you’re just filth. Ser Orson blames me for dispatching his brother to the Sorrows and Ser Lucifer is still seething about that slave girl Caggo took from him.”

“He could have given her back when he’d had her,” Lucifer Long complained. “He had no cause to kill her.”

“She was ugly,” said Caggo. “That’s cause enough.”

The Tattered Prince went on as if no one had spoken. “Webber, you nurse claims to lands lost in Westeros. Lanster, I killed that boy you were so fond of. You Dornish three, you think we lied to you. The plunder from Astapor was much less than you were promised in Volantis, and I took the lion’s share of it.”

“The last part’s true,” Ser Orson said. “The best ruses always have some seed of truth,” said the Tattered Prince. “Every one of you has ample reason for wanting to abandon me. And Daenerys Targaryen knows that sellswords are a fickle lot. Her own Second Sons and Stormcrows took Yunkish gold

but did not hesitate to join her when the tide of battle began to flow her way.”

“When should we leave?” asked Lewis Lanster. “At once. Be wary of the Cats and any Long Lances you may encounter. No one will know your defection is a ruse but those of us in this tent. Turn your tiles too soon, and you will be maimed as deserters or disemboweled as turncloaks.”

The three Dornishmen were silent as they left the command tent. *Twenty riders, all speaking the Common Tongue*, thought Quentyn. *Whispering has just gotten a deal more dangerous.*

The big man slapped him hard across the back. “So. This is sweet, Frog. A dragon hunt.”