

THE PRINCESS IN THE TOWER

Hers was a gentle prison.

Arianne took solace from that. Why would her father go to such great pains to provide for her comfort in captivity if he had marked her for a traitor's death? *He cannot mean to kill me*, she told herself a hundred times. *He does not have it in him to be so cruel. I am his blood and seed, his heir, his only daughter*. If need be, she would throw herself beneath the wheels of his chair, admit her fault, and beg him for his pardon. And she would weep. When he saw tears rolling down her face, he would forgive her.

She was less certain whether she would forgive herself.

"Areo," she had pleaded with her captor during the long dry ride from the Greenblood back to Sunspear, "I never wanted the girl to come to harm. You must believe me."

Hotah made no reply, except to grunt. Arianne could feel his anger. Darkstar had escaped him, the most dangerous of all her little group of plotters. He had outraced all his pursuers and vanished into the deep desert, with blood upon his blade.

"You know me, captain," Arianne had said, as the leagues rolled past. "You have known me since I was little. You always kept me safe, as you kept my lady mother safe when you came with her from Great Norvos to be her shield in a strange land. I need you now. I need your help. I never meant —"

"What you meant does not matter, little princess," Areo Hotah said. "Only what you did." His countenance was stony. "I am sorry. It is for my prince to command, for Hotah to obey."

Arianne expected to be brought before her father's high seat beneath the dome of leaded glass in the Tower of the Sun. Instead, Hotah delivered her to the Spear Tower, and the custody of her father's seneschal Ricasso and Ser Manfrey Martell, the castellan. "Princess," Ricasso said, "you will forgive an old blind man if he does not make the climb with you. These legs

are not equal to so many steps. A chamber has been prepared for you. Ser Manfrey shall escort you there, to await the prince's pleasure."

"The prince's displeasure, you mean. Will my friends be confined here as well?" Arianne had been parted from Garin, Drey, and the others after capture, and Hotah had refused to say what would be done with them. "That is for the prince to decide," was all the captain had to say upon the subject. Ser Manfrey proved a bit more forthcoming. "They were taken to the Planky Town and will be conveyed by ship to Ghaston Grey, until such time as Prince Doran decides their fate."

Ghaston Grey was a crumbling old castle perched on a rock in the Sea of Dorne, a drear and dreadful prison where the vilest of criminals were sent to rot and die. "Does my father mean to *kill* them?" Arianne could not believe it. "All they did they did for love for me. If my father must have blood, it should be mine."

"As you say, princess."

"I want to speak with him."

"He thought you might." Ser Manfrey took her arm and marched her up the steps, up and up until her breath grew short. The Spear Tower stood a hundred and a half feet high, and her cell was nearly at the top. Arianne eyed every door they passed, wondering if one of the Sand Snakes might be locked within.

When her own door had been closed and barred, Arianne explored her new home. Her cell was large and airy, and did not lack for comforts. There were Myrish carpets on the floor, red wine to drink, books to read. In one corner stood an ornate *cyvasse* table with pieces carved of ivory and onyx, though she had no one to play with even if she had been so inclined. She had a featherbed to sleep in, and a privy with a marble seat, sweetened by a basketful of herbs. This high up, the views were splendid. One window opened to the east, so she could watch the sun rise above the sea. The other allowed her to look down upon the Tower of the Sun, and the Winding Walls and Threefold Gate beyond.

The exploration took less time than it would have taken her to lace a pair of sandals, but at least it served to keep the tears at bay for a time.

Arianne found a basin and a flagon of cool water and washed her hands and face, but no amount of scrubbing could cleanse her of her grief. *Arys*, she thought, *my white knight*. Tears filled her eyes, and suddenly she was weeping, her whole body wracked by sobs. She remembered how Hotah's heavy axe had cleaved through his flesh and bone, the way his head had gone spinning through the air. *Why did you do it? Why throw your life away? I never told you to, I never wanted that, I only wanted... I wanted... I wanted...*

That night she cried herself to sleep... for the first time, if not the last. Even in her dreams she found no peace. She dreamt of Arys Oakheart caressing her, smiling at her, telling her that he loved her... but all the while the quarrels were in him and his wounds were weeping, turning his whites to red. Part of her knew it was a nightmare, even as she dreamt it. *Come morning all of this will vanish*, the princess told herself, but when morning came, she was still in her cell, Ser Arys was still dead, and Myrcella... *I never wanted that, never. I meant the girl no harm. All I wanted was for her to be a queen. If we had not been betrayed...*

"Someone told," Hotah had said. The memory still made her angry. Arianne clung to that, feeding the flame within her heart. Anger was better than tears, better than grief, better than guilt. Someone told, someone she had trusted. Arys Oakheart had died because of that, slain by the traitor's whisper as much as by the captain's axe. The blood that had streamed down Myrcella's face, that was the betrayer's work as well. Someone told, someone she had loved. That was the cruelest cut of all.

She found a cedar chest full of her clothes at the foot of her bed, so she stripped out of the travel-stained garb she had slept in and donned the most revealing garments she could find, wisps of silk that covered everything and hid nothing. Prince Doran might treat her like a child, but she refused to dress like one. She knew such garb would discomfit her father when he came to chastise her for making off with Myrcella. She counted on it. *If I must crawl and weep, let him be uncomfortable as well.*

She expected him that day, but when the door finally opened it proved to be only the servants with her midday meal. "When might I see my

father?" she asked, but none of them would answer. The kid had been roasted with lemon and honey. With it were grape leaves stuffed with a mélange of raisins, onions, mushrooms, and fiery dragon peppers. "I am not hungry," Arianne said. Her friends would be eating ship's biscuits and salt beef on their way to Ghaston Grey. "Take this away and bring me Prince Doran." But they left the food, and her father did not come. After a while, hunger weakened her resolve, so she sat and ate.

Once the food was gone, there was nothing else for Arianne to do. She paced around her tower, twice and thrice and three times thrice. She sat beside the *cyvasse* table and idly moved an elephant. She curled up in the window seat and tried to read a book, until the words became a blur and she realized that she was crying again. *Arys, my sweet, my white knight, why did you do it? You should have yielded. I tried to tell you, but the words caught in my mouth. You gallant fool, I never meant for you to die, or for Myrcella... oh, gods be good, that little girl...*

Finally, she crawled back onto the featherbed. The world had grown dark, and there was little she could do but sleep. *Someone told*, she thought. *Someone told*. Garin, Drey, and Spotted Sylva were friends of her girlhood, as dear to her as her cousin Tyene. She could not believe they would inform on her... but that left only Darkstar, and if he was the betrayer, why had he turned his sword on poor Myrcella? *He wanted to kill her instead of crowning her, he said as much at Shandystone. He said that was how I'd get the war I wanted.* But it made no sense for Dayne to be the traitor. If Ser Gerold had been the worm in the apple, why would he have turned his sword upon Myrcella?

Someone told. Could it have been Ser Arys? Had the white knight's guilt won out over his lust? Had he loved Myrcella more than her and betrayed his new princess to atone for his betrayal of the old? Was he so ashamed of what he'd done that he threw his life away at the Greenblood rather than live to face dishonor?

Someone told. When her father came to see her, she would learn which one. Prince Doran did not come the next day, though. Nor the day after. The princess was left alone to pace, and weep, and nurse her wounds. During

the daylight hours she would try to read, but the books that they had given her were deadly dull: ponderous old histories and geographies, annotated maps, a dry-as-dust study of the laws of Dorne, *The Seven-Pointed Star* and *Lives of the High Septons*, a huge tome about dragons that somehow made them about as interesting as newts. Arianne would have given much and more for a copy of *Ten Thousand Ships* or *The Loves of Queen Nymeria*, anything to occupy her thoughts and let her escape her tower for an hour or two, but such amusements were denied her.

From her window seat, she had only to glance out to see the great dome of gold and colored glass below her, where her father sat in state. *He will summon me soon*, she told herself.

No visitors were permitted her beyond the servants; Bors with his stubbly jaw, tall Timoth dripping dignity, the sisters Morra and Mellei, pretty little Cedra, old Belandra who had been her mother's bedmaid. They brought her meals, changed her bed, and emptied the chamber pot beneath her privy, but none would speak with her. When she required more wine, Timoth would fetch it. If she desired some favorite food, figs or olives or peppers stuffed with cheese, she need only tell Belandra, and it would appear. Morra and Mellei took away her dirty clothes and returned them clean and fresh. Every second day a bath was brought for her, and shy little Cedra would soap her back and help her brush her hair.

Yet none of them had a word for her, nor would they deign to tell her what was happening in the world outside her sandstone cage. "Has Darkstar been captured?" she asked Bors one day. "Are they still hunting for him?" The man only turned his back on her and walked away. "Have you gone deaf?" Arianne snapped at him. "Come back here and answer me. I command it." Her only reply was the sound of a door closing.

"Timoth," she tried, another day, "what has become of Princess Myrcella? I never meant for harm to come to her." The last she had seen of the other princess had been on their ride back to Sunspear. Too weak to sit a horse, Myrcella had traveled in a litter, her head bound up in silken bandages where Darkstar slashed at her, her green eyes bright with fever.

“Tell me that she has not died, I beg you. What harm could come of my knowing that? Tell me how she fares.” Timoth would not.

“Belandra,” Arianne said, a few days later, “if you ever loved my lady mother, take pity on her poor daughter and tell me when my father means to come and see me. Please. Please.” But Belandra had lost her tongue as well.

Is this my father’s notion of torment? Not hot irons or the rack, but simple silence? That was so very like Doran Martell that Arianne had to laugh. He thinks he is being subtle when he is only being feeble. She resolved to enjoy the quiet, to use the time to heal and fortify herself for what must come.

It was no good dwelling endlessly on Ser Arys, she knew. Instead, she made herself think about the Sand Snakes, Tyene especially. Arianne loved all her bastard cousins, from prickly, hot-tempered Obara to little Loreza, the youngest, only six years old. Tyene had always been the one she loved the most, though; the sweet sister that she never had. The princess had never been close to her brothers; Quentyn was off at Yronwood, and Trystane was too young. No, it had always been her and Tyene, with Garin and Drey and Spotted Sylva. Nym would sometimes join them in their sport, and Sarella was forever pushing in where she didn’t belong, but for the most part they had been a company of five. They splashed in the pools and fountains of the Water Gardens, and rode into battle perched on one another’s naked backs. She and Tyene had learned to read together, learned to ride together, learned to dance together. When they were ten Arianne had stolen a flagon of wine, and the two of them had gotten drunk together. They shared meals and beds and jewelry. They would have shared their first man as well, but Drey got too excited and spurted all over Tyene’s fingers the moment she drew him from his breeches. *Her hands are dangerous.* The memory made her smile.

The more she thought about her cousins, the more the princess missed them. *For all I know, they might be right below me.* That night Arianne tried pounding on the floor with the heel of her sandal. When no one answered, she leaned out a window and peered down. She could see other windows below, smaller than her own, some no more than arrow loops. “*Tyene!*” she

called. “*Tyene, are you there? Obara, Nym? Can you hear me? Ellaria? Anyone? TYENE?*” The princess spent half the night hanging out the window, calling till her throat was raw, but no answering shouts came back to her. That frightened her more than she could say. If the Sand Snakes were imprisoned in the Spear Tower, they surely would have heard her shouting. Why didn’t they answer? *If Father has done them harm, I will never forgive him, never*, she told herself.

By the time a fortnight had passed, her patience had worn paper-thin. “I will speak with my father now,” she told Bors, in her most commanding voice. “You will take me to him.” He did not take her to him. “I am ready to see the prince,” she told Timoth, but he turned away as if he had not heard. The next morning, Arianne was waiting beside the door when it opened. She bolted past Belandra, sending a platter of spiced eggs to crash against the wall, but the guards caught her before she’d gone three yards. She knew them too, but they were deaf to her entreaties. They dragged her back to her cell, kicking and squirming.

Arianne decided that she must needs be more subtle. Cedra was her best hope; the girl was young, naive, and gullible. Garin had boasted of bedding her once, the princess recalled. The next time she bathed, as Cedra soaped her shoulders, she began to talk of everything and nothing. “I know you have been commanded not to speak to me,” she said, “but no one told me not to speak to you.” She spoke about the heat of the day, and what she’d had last night for supper, and how slow and stiff poor Belandra was becoming. Prince Oberyne had armed each of *his* daughters so they need never be defenseless, but Arianne Martell had no weapon but her guile. And so she smiled and charmed, and asked nothing in return of Cedra, neither word nor nod.

The next day at supper, she nattered at the girl again as she was serving. This time she contrived to mention Garin. Cedra glanced up shyly at his name and almost spilled the wine that she was pouring. *So it is that way, is it?* thought Arianne.

During her next bath, she spoke of her imprisoned friends, especially Garin. “He’s the one I fear for most,” she confided to the serving girl. “The

orphans are free spirits, they live to wander. Garin needs sunshine and fresh air. If they lock him away in some dank stone cell, how will he survive? He will not last a year at Ghaston Grey.” Cedra did not reply, but her face was pale when Arianne rose from the water, and she was squeezing the sponge so tightly that soap was dripping on the Myrish carpet.

Even so, it was four more days and two more baths before the girl was hers. “Please,” Cedra finally whispered, after Arianne had painted a vivid picture of Garin throwing himself from the window of his cell, to taste freedom one last time before he died. “You have to help him. Please don’t let him die.”

“I can do little and less so long as I am locked up here,” she whispered back. “My father will not see me. *You* are the only one who can save Garin. Do you love him?”

“Yes,” Cedra whispered, blushing. “But how can I help?”

“You can smuggle out a letter for me,” said the princess. “Will do you that? Will you take the risk... for Garin?”

Cedra’s eyes got big. She nodded.

I have a raven, Arianne thought, triumphantly, but who to send her to? The only one of her conspirators to escape her father’s net was Darkstar. By now Ser Gerold might well have been taken, however; if not, he would surely have fled Dorne. Her next thought was of Garin’s mother and the orphans of the Greenblood. *No, not them. It must be someone with real power, someone who had no part of our plot yet might have reason to be sympathetic to us.* She considered appealing to her own mother, but Lady Mellario was far away in Norvos. Besides, Prince Doran had not listened to his lady wife for many years. *Not her either. I need a lord, one great enough to cow my father into releasing me.*

The most powerful of the Dornish lords was Anders Yronwood, the Bloodroyal, Lord of Yronwood and Warden of the Stone Way, but Arianne knew better than to look for help from the man who had fostered her brother Quentyn. *No.* Drey’s brother Ser Deziel Dalt had once aspired to marry her, but he was much too dutiful to go against his prince. Besides, whilst the Knight of Lemonwood might intimidate a petty lord, he did not

have the strength to sway the Prince of Dorne. *No*. The same was true of Spotted Sylva's father. *No*. Arianne finally decided that she had but two real hopes: Harmen Uller, Lord of Hellholt, and Franklyn Fowler, Lord of Skyreach and Warden of the Prince's Pass.

Half of the Ullers are half-mad, the saying went, *and the other half are worse*. Ellaria Sand was Lord Harmen's natural daughter. She and her little ones had been locked away with the rest of the Sand Snakes. That would have made Lord Harmen wroth, and the Ullers were dangerous when wroth. *Too dangerous, perhaps*. The princess did not want to put any more lives in danger.

Lord Fowler might be a safer choice. The Old Hawk, he was called. He had never gotten on with Anders Yronwood; there was bad blood between their Houses going back a thousand years, from when the Fowlers had chosen Martell over Yronwood during Nymeria's War. The Fowler twins were famous friends of Lady Nym as well, but how much weight would that carry with the Old Hawk?

For days Arianne wavered as she composed her secret letter. "Give the man who brings this to you a hundred silver stags," she began. That should ensure that the message was delivered. She wrote where she was, and pleaded for rescue. "Whoever shall deliver me from this cell, he shall not be forgotten when I wed." *That should bring the heroes running*. Unless Prince Doran had attainted her, she remained the lawful heir to Sunspear; the man who married her would one day rule Dorne by her side. Arianne could only pray that her rescuer would prove younger than the greybeards her father had offered her over the years. "I want a consort with teeth," she had told him when she refused the last.

She dare not ask for parchment for fear of rousing the suspicions of her captors, so she wrote the letter on the bottom of a page torn from *The Seven-Pointed Star*, and pressed it into Cedra's hand on her next bath day. "There's a place beside the Threefold Gate where the caravans take on supplies before crossing the deep sand," Arianne told her. "Find some traveler headed for the Prince's Pass, and promise him a hundred silver stags if he will put this in Lord Fowler's hand."

“I will.” Cedra hid the message in her bodice. “I’ll find someone before the sun goes down, princess.”

“Good,” she said. “Tell me how it went on the morrow.”

The girl did not return upon the morrow, however. Nor on the day that followed. When it was time for Arianne to bathe, it was Morra and Mellei who filled her tub, and stayed to wash her back and brush her hair. “Has Cedra taken ill?” the princess asked them, but neither would reply. *She has been caught* was all that she could think. *What else could it be?* That night she hardly slept, for fear of what might come next.

When Timoth brought her breakfast the next morning, Arianne asked to see Ricasso rather than her father. Plainly she could not compel Prince Doran to attend her, but surely a mere seneschal would not ignore a summons from the rightful heir to Sunspear.

He did, though. “Did you tell Ricasso what I said?” she demanded the next time she saw Timoth. “Did you tell him I had need of him?” When the man refused to answer her, Arianne seized a flagon of red wine and upended it over his head. The serving man retreated dripping, his face a mask of wounded dignity. *My father means to leave me here to rot*, the princess decided. *Or else he is making plans to marry me off to some disgusting old fool and intends to keep me locked away until the bedding.*

Arianne Martell had grown up expecting that one day she would wed some great lord of her father’s choosing. That was what princesses were for, she had been taught... though, admittedly, her uncle Oberyne had taken a different view of matters. “If you would wed, wed,” the Red Viper had told his own daughters. “If not, take your pleasure where you find it. There’s little enough of it in this world. Choose well, though. If you saddle yourself with a fool or a brute, don’t look to me to rid you of him. I gave you the tools to do that for yourself.”

The freedom that Prince Oberyne allowed his bastard daughters had never been shared by Prince Doran’s lawful heir. Arianne must wed; she had accepted that. Drey had wanted her, she knew; so had his brother Deziel, the Knight of Lemonwood. Daemon Sand had gone so far as to ask

for her hand. Daemon was bastard-born, however, and Prince Doran did not mean for her to wed a Dornishman.

Arianne had accepted that as well. One year King Robert's brother came to visit and she did her best to seduce him, but she was half a girl and Lord Renly seemed more bemused than inflamed by her overtures. Later, when Hoster Tully asked her to come to Riverrun and meet his heir, she lit candles to the Maid in thanks, but Prince Doran had declined the invitation. The princess might even have considered Willas Tyrell, crippled leg and all, but her father refused to send her to Highgarden to meet him. She tried to go despite him, with Tyene's help... but Prince Oberyn caught them at Vaith and brought them back. That same year, Prince Doran tried to betroth her to Ben Beesbury, a minor lordling who was eighty if he was a day, and as blind as he was toothless.

Beesbury died a few years later. That gave her some small comfort in her present pass; she could not be forced to marry him if he was dead. And the Lord of the Crossing had wed again, so she was safe from him as well. *Elden Estermont is still alive and unwed, though. Lord Rosby and Lord Grandison as well.* Grandison was called the Greybeard, but by the time she'd met him his beard had gone snow white. At the welcoming feast, he had gone to sleep between the fish course and the meat. Drey called that apt, since his sigil was a sleeping lion. Garin challenged her to see if she could tie a knot in his beard without waking him, but Arianne refrained. Grandison had seemed a pleasant fellow, less querulous than Estermont and more robust than Rosby. She would never marry him, however. *Not even if Hotah stands behind me with his axe.*

No one came to marry her the next day, nor the day after. Nor did Cedra return. Arianne tried to win Morra and Mellei the same way, but it was no good. If she had been able to get either one alone she might have some hope, but together the sisters were a wall. By that time, the princess would have welcomed a touch of a hot iron, or an evening on the rack. The loneliness was like to drive her mad. *I deserve a headsman's axe for what I did, but he will not even give me that. He would sooner shut me away and*

forget I ever lived. She wondered if Maester Caleotte was drawing a proclamation to name her brother Quentyn heir to Dorne.

Days came and went, one after the other, so many that Arianne lost count of how long she had been imprisoned. She found herself spending more and more time abed, until she reached the point where she did not rise at all except to use her privy. The meals the servants brought grew cold, untouched. Arianne slept and woke and slept again, and still felt too weary to rise. She prayed to the Mother for mercy and to the Warrior for courage, then slept some more. Fresh meals replaced the old ones, but she did not eat them either. Once, when she felt especially strong, she carried all the food to the window and flung it out into the yard, so it would not tempt her. The effort exhausted her, so afterward she crawled back into bed and slept for half a day.

Then came a day when a rough hand woke her, shaking her by the shoulder. “Little princess,” said a voice she’d known from childhood. “Up and dress. The prince has called for you.” Areo Hotah stood over her, her old friend and protector. He was *talking* to her. Arianne smiled sleepily. It was good to see that seamed, scarred face, and hear his gruff, deep voice and thick Norvoshi accent. “What did you do with Cedra?”

“The prince sent her to the Water Gardens,” Hotah said. “He will tell you. First you must wash, and eat.”

She must look a wretched creature. Arianne crawled from the bed, weak as a kitten. “Have Morra and Mellei prepare a bath,” she told him, “and tell Timoth to bring me up some food. Nothing heavy. Some cold broth and a bit of bread and fruit.”

“Aye,” said Hotah. Never had she heard a sweeter sound.

The captain waited without whilst the princess bathed and brushed her hair and ate sparingly of the cheese and fruit they’d brought her. She drank a little wine to settle her stomach. *I am frightened*, she realized, *for the first time in my life, I am frightened of my father.* That made her laugh until the wine came out her nose. When it was time to dress, she chose a simple gown of ivory linen, with vines and purple grapes embroidered around the sleeves and bodice. She wore no jewels. *I must be chaste and humble and*

contrite. I must throw myself at his feet and beg forgiveness, or I may never hear another human voice again.

By the time she was ready, dusk had fallen. Arianne had thought that Hotah would escort her to the Tower of the Sun to hear her father's judgment. Instead he delivered her to the prince's solar, where they found Doran Martell seated behind a *cyvasse* table, his gouty legs supported by a cushioned footstool. He was toying with an onyx elephant, turning it in his reddened, swollen hands. The prince looked worse than she had ever seen him. His face was pale and puffy, his joints so inflamed that it hurt her just to look at them. Seeing him this way made Arianne's heart go out to him... yet somehow she could not bring herself to kneel and beg, as she had planned. "Father," she said instead.

When he raised his head to look at her, his dark eyes were clouded with pain. *Is that the gout?* Arianne wondered. *Or is it me?* "A strange and subtle folk, the Volantenes," he muttered, as he put the elephant aside. "I saw Volantis once, on my way to Norvos, where I first met Mellario. The bells were ringing, and the bears danced down the steps. Areo will recall the day."

"I remember," echoed Areo Hotah in his deep voice. "The bears danced and the bells rang, and the prince wore red and gold and orange. My lady asked me who it was who shone so bright."

Prince Doran smiled wanly. "Leave us, captain."

Hotah stamped the butt of his longaxe on the floor, turned on his heel, and took his leave.

"I told them to place a *cyvasse* table in your chambers," her father said when the two of them were alone.

"Who was I supposed to play with?" Why is he talking about a game? Has the gout robbed him of his wits?

"Yourself. Sometimes it is best to study a game before you attempt to play it. How well do you know the game, Arianne?"

"Well enough to play."

“But not to win. My brother loved the fight for its own sake, but I only play such games as I can win. *Cyvasse* is not for me.” He studied her face for a long moment before he said, “Why? Tell me that, Arianne. Tell me why.”

“For the honor of our House.” Her father’s voice made her angry. He sounded so sad, so exhausted, so *weak*. *You are a prince!* she wanted to shout. *You should be raging!* “Your meekness shames all Dorne, Father. Your brother went to King’s Landing in your place, and *they killed him!*”

“Do you think I do not know that? Oberyn is with me every time I close my eyes.”

“Telling you to open them, no doubt.” She seated herself across the *cyvasse* table from her father.

“I did not give you leave to sit.”

“Then call Hotah back and whip me for my insolence. You are the Prince of Dorne. You can do that.” She touched one of the *cyvasse* pieces, the heavy horse. “Have you caught Ser Gerold?”

He shook his head. “Would that we had. You were a fool to make him part of this. Darkstar is the most dangerous man in Dorne. You and he have done us all great harm.”

Arianne was almost afraid to ask. “Myrcella. Is she...?”

“...dead? No, though Darkstar did his best. All eyes were on your white knight so no one seems quite certain just what happened, but it would appear that her horse shied away from his at the last instant, else he would have taken off the top of the girl’s skull. As it is, the slash opened her cheek down to the bone and sliced off her right ear. Maester Caleotte was able to save her life, but no poultice nor potion will ever restore her face. She was my *ward*, Arianne. Betrothed to your own brother and under my protection. You have dishonored all of us.”

“I never meant her harm,” Arianne insisted. “If Hotah had not interfered...”

“...you would have crowned Myrcella queen, to raise a rebellion against her brother. Instead of an ear, she would have lost her life.”

“Only if we lost.”

“*If?* The word is *when*. Dorne is the least populous of the Seven Kingdoms. It pleased the Young Dragon to make all our armies larger when he wrote that book of his, so as to make his conquest that much more glorious, and it has pleased us to water the seed he planted and let our foes think us more powerful than we are, but a princess ought to know the truth. Valor is a poor substitute for numbers. Dorne cannot hope to win a war against the Iron Throne, not alone. And yet that may well be what you have given us. Are you proud?” The prince did not allow her time to answer. “What am I to do with you, Arianne?”

Forgive me, part of her wanted to say, but his words had cut her too deeply. “Why, do what you always do. Do nothing.”

“You make it difficult for a man to swallow his anger.”

“Best stop swallowing, you’re like to choke on it.” The prince did not answer. “Tell me how you knew my plans.”

“I am the Prince of Dorne. Men seek my favor.”

Someone told. “You knew, and yet you still allowed us to make off with Myrcella. Why?”

“That was my mistake, and it has proved a grievous one. You are my daughter, Arianne. The little girl who used to run to me when she skinned her knee. I found it hard to believe that you would conspire against me. I had to learn the truth.”

“Now you have. I want to know who informed on me.”

“I would as well, in your place.”

“Will you tell me?”

“I can think of no reason why I should.”

“You think I cannot discover the truth on my own?”

“You are welcome to try. Until such time you must mistrust them all... and a little mistrust is a good thing in a princess.” Prince Doran sighed.

“You disappoint me, Arianne.”

“Said the crow to the raven. You have been disappointing me for years, Father.” She had not meant to be so blunt with him, but the words came spilling out. *There, now I have said it.*

“I know. I am too meek and weak and cautious, too lenient to our enemies. Just now, though, you are in need of some of that leniency, it seems to me. You ought to be pleading for my forgiveness rather than seeking to provoke me further.”

“I ask leniency only for my friends.”

“How noble of you.”

“What they did they did for love for me. They do not deserve to die on Ghaston Grey.”

“As it happens, I agree. Aside from Darkstar, your fellow plotters were no more than foolish children. Still, this was no harmless game of *cyvasse*. You and your friends were playing at treason. I might have had their heads off.”

“You might have, but you didn’t. Dayne, Dalt, Santagar... no, you would never dare make enemies of such Houses.”

“I dare more than you dream... but leave that for the nonce. Ser Andrey has been sent to Norvos to serve your lady mother for three years. Garin will spend his next two years in Tyrosh. From his kin amongst the orphans, I took coin and hostages. Lady Sylva received no punishment from me, but she was of an age to marry. Her father has shipped her to Greenstone to wed Lord Estermont. As for Arys Oakheart, he chose his own fate and met it bravely. A knight of the Kingsguard... what did you *do* to him?”

“I fucked him, Father. You did command me to entertain our noble visitors, as I recall.”

His face grew flushed. “Was that all that was required?”

“I told him that once Myrcella was the queen she would give us leave to marry. He wanted me for his wife.”

“You did everything you could to stop him from dishonoring his vows, I am certain,” her father said.

It was her turn to flush. Her seduction of Ser Arys had required half a year. Though he claimed to have known other women before taking the white, she would never have known that from the way he acted. His caresses had been clumsy, his kisses nervous, and the first time they were abed together he spent his seed on her thigh as she was guiding him inside her with her hand. Worse, he had been consumed by shame. If she only had a dragon for every time he had whispered, “We should not be doing this,” she would be richer than the Lannisters. *Did he charge at Areo Hotah in hopes of saving me?* Arianne wondered. *Or did he do it to escape me, to wash out his dishonor with his life’s blood?* “He did love me,” she heard herself say. “He died for me.”

“If so, he may well be but the first of many. You and your cousins wanted war. You may get your wish. Another Kingsguard knight creeps toward Sunspear even as we speak. Ser Balon Swann is bringing me the Mountain’s head. My bannermen have been delaying him, to purchase me some time. The Wyls kept him hunting and hawking for eight days on the Boneway, and Lord Yronwood feasted him for a fortnight when he emerged from the mountains. At present he is at the Tor, where Lady Jordayne has arranged games in his honor. When he reaches Ghost Hill he will find Lady Toland intent on outdoing her. Soon or late, however, Ser Balon must arrive at Sunspear, and when he does he will expect to see Princess Myrcella... and Ser Arys, his Sworn Brother. What shall we tell him, Arianne? Shall I say that Oakheart perished in a hunting accident, or from a tumble down some slippery steps? Perhaps Arys went swimming at the Water Gardens, slipped upon the marble, hit his head, and drowned?”

“No,” Arianne said. “Say that he died defending his little princess. Tell Ser Balon that Darkstar tried to kill her and Ser Arys stepped between them and saved her life.” That was how the white knights of the Kingsguard were supposed to die, giving up their own lives for those that they had sworn to protect. “Ser Balon may be suspicious, as you were when the Lannisters killed your sister and her children, but he will have no proof...”

“...until he speaks with Myrcella. Or must that brave child suffer a tragic accident as well? If so, it will mean war. No lie will save Dorne from

the queen's wroth if her daughter should perish whilst in my care."

He needs me, Arianne realized. That's why he sent for me.

"I could tell Myrcella what to say, but why should I?"

A spasm of anger rippled across her father's face. "I warn you, Arianne, I am out of patience."

"With me?" *That is so like him.* "For Lord Tywin and the Lannisters you always had the forbearance of Baelor the Blessed, but for your own blood, none."

"You mistake patience for forbearance. I have worked at the downfall of Tywin Lannister since the day they told me of Elia and her children. It was my hope to strip him of all that he held most dear before I killed him, but it would seem his dwarf son has robbed me of that pleasure. I take some small solace in knowing that he died a cruel death at the hands of the monster that he himself begot. Be that as it may. Lord Tywin is howling down in hell... where thousands more will soon be joining him, if your folly turns to war." Her father grimaced, as if the very word were painful to him. "Is that what you want?"

The princess refused to be cowed. "I want my cousins freed. I want my uncle avenged. I want my rights."

"Your *rights*?"

"Dorne."

"You will have Dorne after I am dead. Are you so anxious to be rid of me?"

"I should turn that question back on you, Father. You have been trying to rid yourself of me for years."

"That is not true."

"No? Shall we ask my brother?"

"Trystane?"

"Quentyn."

"What of him?"

"Where is he?"

“He is with Lord Yronwood’s host in the Boneway.”

“You do lie well, Father, I will grant you that. You did not so much as blink. Quentyn has gone to Lys.”

“Where did you get that notion?”

“A friend told me.” She could have secrets too.

“Your friend lied. You have my word, your brother has not gone to Lys. I swear it by sun and spear and Seven.”

Arianne could not be fooled so easily. “Is it Myr, then? Tyrosh? I know he is somewhere across the narrow sea, hiring sellswords to steal away my birthright.”

Her father’s face darkened. “This mistrust does you no honor, Arianne. Quentyn should be the one conspiring against me. I sent him away when he was just a child, too young to understand the needs of Dorne. Anders Yronwood has been more a father to him than I have, yet your brother remains faithful and obedient.”

“Why not? You favor him and always have. He looks like you, he thinks like you, and you mean to give him Dorne, don’t trouble to deny it. I read your letter.” The words still burned as bright as fire in her memory. “‘*One day you will sit where I sit and rule all Dorne,*’ you wrote him. Tell me, Father, when did you decide to disinherit me? Was it the day that Quentyn was born, or the day that *I* was born? What did I ever do to make you hate me so?” To her fury, there were tears in her eyes.

“I never hated you.” Prince Doran’s voice was parchment-thin, and full of grief. “Arianne, you do not understand.”

“Do you deny you wrote those words?”

“No. That was when Quentyn first went to Yronwood. I did intend for him to follow me, yes. I had other plans for you.”

“Oh, yes,” she said scornfully, “such plans. Gyles Rosby. Blind Ben Beesbury. Greybeard Grandison. They were your *plans*.”

She gave him no chance to reply. “I know it is my duty to provide an heir for Dorne, I have *never* been forgetful of that. I would have wed, and gladly, but the matches that you brought to me were insults. With every one

you spit on me. If you ever felt any love for me at all, why offer me to *Walder Frey*?”

“Because I knew that you would spurn him. I had to be seen to *try* to find a consort for you once you’d reached a certain age, else it would have raised suspicions, but I dared not bring you any man you might accept. You were promised, Arianne.”

Promised? Arianne stared at him incredulously. “What are you saying? Is this another lie? You never said...”

“The pact was sealed in secret. I meant to tell you when you were old enough... when you came of age, I thought, but...”

“I am three-and-twenty, for seven years a woman grown.”

“I know. If I kept you ignorant too long, it was only to protect you. Arianne, your nature... to you, a secret was only a choice tale to whisper to Garin and Tyene in your bed of a night. Garin gossips as only the orphans can, and Tyene keeps nothing from Obara and the Lady Nym. And if they knew... Obara is too fond of wine, and Nym is too close to the Fowler twins. And who might the Fowler twins confide in? *I could not take the risk.*”

She was lost, confounded. *Promised. I was promised.* “Who is it? Who have I been betrothed to, all these years?”

“It makes no matter. He is dead.”

That left her more baffled than ever. “The old ones are so frail. Was it a broken hip, a chill, the gout?”

“It was a pot of molten gold. We princes make our careful plans and the gods smash them all awry.” Prince Doran made a weary gesture with a chafed red hand. “Dorne will be yours. You have my word on that, if my word still has any meaning for you. Your brother Quentyn has a harder road to walk.”

“What road?” Arianne regarded him suspiciously. “What are you holding back? Seven save me, but I am sick of secrets. Tell me the rest, Father... or else name Quentyn your heir and send for Hotah and his axe, and let me die beside my cousins.”

“Do you truly believe I would harm my brother’s children?” Her father grimaced. “Obara, Nym, and Tyene lack for nothing but their freedom, and Ellaria and her daughters are happily ensconced at the Water Gardens. Dorea stalks about knocking oranges off the trees with her morningstar, and Elia and Obella have become the terror of the pools.” He sighed. “It has not been so long since you were playing in those pools. You used to ride the shoulders of an older girl... a tall girl with wispy yellow hair...”

“Jeyne Fowler, or her sister Jennelyn.” It had been years since Arianne had thought of that. “Oh, and Frynne, her father was a smith. Her hair was brown. Garin was my favorite, though. When I rode Garin no one could defeat us, not even Nym and that green-haired Tyroshi girl.”

“That green-haired girl was the Archon’s daughter. I was to have sent you to Tyrosh in her place. You would have served the Archon as a cupbearer and met with your betrothed in secret, but your mother threatened to harm herself if I stole another of her children, and I... I could not do that to her.”

His tale grows ever stranger. “Is that where Quentyn’s gone? To Tyrosh, to court the Archon’s green-haired daughter?”

Her father plucked up a *cyvasse* piece. “I must know how you learned that Quentyn was abroad. Your brother went with Cletus Yronwood, Maester Kedry, and three of Lord Yronwood’s best young knights on a long and perilous voyage, with an uncertain welcome at its end. He has gone to bring us back our heart’s desire.”

She narrowed her eyes. “What is our heart’s desire?”

“Vengeance.” His voice was soft, as if he were afraid that someone might be listening. “Justice.” Prince Doran pressed the onyx dragon into her palm with his swollen, gouty fingers, and whispered, “*Fire and blood.*”