

DAENERYS

She could hear the dead man coming up the steps. The slow, measured sound of footsteps went before him, echoing amongst the purple pillars of her hall. Daenerys Targaryen awaited him upon the ebon bench that she had made her throne. Her eyes were soft with sleep, her silver-gold hair all tousled.

“Your Grace,” said Ser Barristan Selmy, the lord commander of her Queensguard, “there is no need for you to see this.”

“He died for me.” Dany clutched her lion pelt to her chest. Underneath, a sheer white linen tunic covered her to mid thigh. She had been dreaming of a house with a red door when Missandei woke her. There had been no time to dress.

“*Khaleesi*,” whispered Irri, “you must not touch the dead man. It is bad luck to touch the dead.”

“Unless you killed them yourself.” Jhiqui was bigger-boned than Irri, with wide hips and heavy breasts. “That is known.”

“It is known,” Irri agreed.

Dothraki were wise where horses were concerned, but could be utter fools about much else. *They are only girls, besides*. Her handmaids were of an age with her—women grown to look at them, with their black hair, copper skin, and almond-shaped eyes, but girls all the same. They had been given to her when she wed Khal Drogo. It was Drogo who had given her the pelt she wore, the head and hide of a *hrakkar*, the white lion of the Dothraki sea. It was too big for her and had a musty smell, but it made her feel as if her sun-and-stars was still near her.

Grey Worm appeared atop the steps first, a torch in hand. His bronze cap was crested with three spikes. Behind him followed four of his Unsullied, bearing the dead man on their shoulders. Their caps had only one spike

each, and their faces showed so little they might have been cast of bronze as well. They laid the corpse down at her feet. Ser Barristan pulled back the bloodstained shroud. Grey Worm lowered the torch, so she might see.

The dead man's face was smooth and hairless, though his cheeks had been slashed open ear to ear. He had been a tall man, blue-eyed and fair of face. *Some child of Lys or Old Volantis, snatched off a ship by corsairs and sold into bondage in red Astapor.* Though his eyes were open, it was his wounds that wept. There were more wounds than she could count.

"Your Grace," Ser Barristan said, "there was a harpy drawn on the bricks in the alley where he was found ..."

"... drawn in blood." Daenerys knew the way of it by now. The Sons of the Harpy did their butchery by night, and over each kill they left their mark.

"Grey Worm, why was this man alone? Had he no partner?" By her command, when the Unsullied walked the streets of Meereen by night they always walked in pairs.

"My queen," replied the captain, "your servant Stalwart Shield had no duty last night. He had gone to a ... a certain place ... to drink, and have companionship."

"A certain place? What do you mean?"

"A house of pleasure, Your Grace."

A brothel. Half of her freedmen were from Yunkai, where the Wise Masters had been famed for training bedslaves. *The way of the seven sighs.* Brothels had sprouted up like mushrooms all over Meereen. *It is all they know. They need to survive.* Food was more costly every day, whilst the price of flesh grew cheaper. In the poorer districts between the stepped pyramids of Meereen's slaver nobility, there were brothels catering to every conceivable erotic taste, she knew. *Even so ...* "What could a eunuch hope to find in a brothel?"

"Even those who lack a man's parts may still have a man's heart, Your Grace," said Grey Worm. "This one has been told that your servant Stalwart

Shield sometimes gave coin to the women of the brothels to lie with him and hold him.”

The blood of the dragon does not weep. “Stalwart Shield,” she said, dry-eyed. “That was his name?”

“If it please Your Grace.”

“It is a fine name.” The Good Masters of Astapor had not allowed their slave soldiers even names. Some of her Unsullied reclaimed their birth names after she had freed them; others chose new names for themselves. “Is it known how many attackers fell upon Stalwart Shield?”

“This one does not know. Many.”

“Six or more,” said Ser Barristan. “From the look of his wounds, they swarmed him from all sides. He was found with an empty scabbard. It may be that he wounded some of his attackers.”

Dany said a silent prayer that somewhere one of the Harpy’s Sons was dying even now, clutching at his belly and writhing in pain. “Why did they cut open his cheeks like that?”

“Gracious queen,” said Grey Worm, “his killers had forced the genitals of a goat down the throat of your servant Stalwart Shield. This one removed them before bringing him here.”

They could not feed him his own genitals. The Astapori left him neither root nor stem. “The Sons grow bolder,” Dany observed. Until now, they had limited their attacks to unarmed freedmen, cutting them down in the streets or breaking into their homes under the cover of darkness to murder them in their beds. “This is the first of my soldiers they have slain.”

“The first,” Ser Barristan warned, “but not the last.”

I am still at war, Dany realized, *only now I am fighting shadows.* She had hoped for a respite from the killing, for some time to build and heal.

Shrugging off the lion pelt, she knelt beside the corpse and closed the dead man's eyes, ignoring Jhiqui's gasp. "Stalwart Shield shall not be forgotten. Have him washed and dressed for battle and bury him with cap and shield and spears."

"It shall be as Your Grace commands," said Grey Worm.

"Send men to the Temple of the Graces and ask if any man has come to the Blue Graces with a sword wound. And spread the word that we will pay good gold for the short sword of Stalwart Shield. Inquire of the butchers and the herdsmen, and learn who has been gelding goats of late." Perhaps some goatherd would confess. "Henceforth, no man of mine walks alone after dark."

"These ones shall obey."

Daenerys pushed her hair back. "Find these cowards for me. Find them, so that I might teach the Harpy's Sons what it means to wake the dragon."

Grey Worm saluted her. His Unsullied closed the shroud once more, lifted the dead man onto their shoulders, and bore him from the hall. Ser Barristan Selmy remained behind. His hair was white, and there were crow's-feet at the corners of his pale blue eyes. Yet his back was still un-bent, and the years had not yet robbed him of his skill at arms. "Your Grace," he said, "I fear your eunuchs are ill suited for the tasks you set them."

Dany settled on her bench and wrapped her pelt about her shoulders once again. "The Unsullied are my finest warriors."

"Soldiers, not warriors, if it please Your Grace. They were made for the battlefield, to stand shoulder to shoulder behind their shields with their spears thrust out before them. Their training teaches them to obey, fearlessly, perfectly, without thought or hesitation ... not to unravel secrets or ask questions."

"Would knights serve me any better?" Selmy was training knights for her, teaching the sons of slaves to fight with lance and longsword in the

Westerosi fashion ... but what good would lances do against cowards who killed from the shadows?

“Not in this,” the old man admitted. “And Your Grace has no knights, save me. It will be years before the boys are ready.”

“Then who, if not Unsullied? Dothraki would be even worse.” Dothraki fought from horseback. Mounted men were of more use in open fields and hills than in the narrow streets and alleys of the city. Beyond Meereen’s walls of many-colored brick, Dany’s rule was tenuous at best. Thousands of slaves still toiled on vast estates in the hills, growing wheat and olives, herding sheep and goats, and mining salt and copper. Meereen’s storehouses held ample supplies of grain, oil, olives, dried fruit, and salted meat, but the stores were dwindling. So Dany had dispatched her tiny *khalasar* to subdue the hinterlands, under the command of her three bloodriders, whilst Brown Ben Plumm took his Second Sons south to guard against Yunkish incursions.

The most crucial task of all she had entrusted to Daario Naharis, glib-tongued Daario with his gold tooth and trident beard, smiling his wicked smile through purple whiskers. Beyond the eastern hills was a range of rounded sandstone mountains, the Khyzai Pass, and Lhazar. If Daario could convince the Lhazarene to reopen the overland trade routes, grains could be brought down the river or over the hills at need ... but the Lamb Men had no reason to love Meereen. “When the Stormcrows return from Lhazar, perhaps I can use them in the streets,” she told Ser Barristan, “but until then I have only the Unsullied.” Dany rose. “You must excuse me, ser. The petitioners will soon be at my gates. I must don my floppy ears and become their queen again. Summon Reznak and the Shavepate, I’ll see them when I’m dressed.”

“As Your Grace commands.” Selmy bowed.

The Great Pyramid shouldered eight hundred feet into the sky, from its huge square base to the lofty apex where the queen kept her private chambers, surrounded by greenery and fragrant pools. As a cool blue dawn broke over the city, Dany walked out onto the terrace. To the west sunlight blazed off the golden domes of the Temple of the Graces, and etched deep shadows

behind the stepped pyramids of the mighty. *In some of those pyramids, the Sons of the Harpy are plotting new murders even now, and I am powerless to stop them.*

Viserion sensed her disquiet. The white dragon lay coiled around a pear tree, his head resting on his tail. When Dany passed his eyes came open, two pools of molten gold. His horns were gold as well, and the scales that ran down his back from head to tail. “You’re lazy,” she told him, scratching under his jaw. His scales were hot to the touch, like armor left too long in the sun. *Dragons are fire made flesh.* She had read that in one of the books Ser Jorah had given her as a wedding gift. “You should be hunting with your brothers. Have you and Drogon been fighting again?” Her dragons were growing wild of late. Rhaegal had snapped at Irri, and Viserion had set Reznak’s *tokar* ablaze the last time the seneschal had called. *I have left them too much to themselves, but where am I to find the time for them?*

Viserion’s tail lashed sideways, thumping the trunk of the tree so hard that a pear came tumbling down to land at Dany’s feet. His wings unfolded, and he half flew, half hopped onto the parapet. *He grows,* she thought as he launched himself into the sky. *They are all three growing. Soon they will be large enough to bear my weight.* Then she would fly as Aegon the Conqueror had flown, up and up, until Meereen was so small that she could blot it out with her thumb.

She watched Viserion climb in widening circles until he was lost to sight beyond the muddy waters of the Skahazadhan. Only then did Dany go back inside the pyramid, where Irri and Jhiqui were waiting to brush the tangles from her hair and garb her as befit the Queen of Meereen, in a Ghiscari *tokar*.

The garment was a clumsy thing, a long loose shapeless sheet that had to be wound around her hips and under an arm and over a shoulder, its dangling fringes carefully layered and displayed. Wound too loose, it was like to fall off; wound too tight, it would tangle, trip, and bind. Even wound properly, the *tokar* required its wearer to hold it in place with the left hand. Walking in a *tokar* demanded small, mincing steps and exquisite balance, lest one tread upon those heavy trailing fringes. It was not a garment meant for any

man who had to work. The *tokar* was a *master's* garment, a sign of wealth and power.

Dany had wanted to ban the *tokar* when she took Meereen, but her advisors had convinced her otherwise. "The Mother of Dragons must don the *tokar* or be forever hated," warned the Green Grace, Galazza Galare. "In the wools of Westeros or a gown of Myrish lace, Your Radiance shall forever remain a stranger amongst us, a grotesque outlander, a barbarian conqueror. Meereen's queen must be a lady of Old Ghis." Brown Ben Plumm, the captain of the Second Sons, had put it more succinctly. "Man wants to be the king o' the rabbits, he best wear a pair o' floppy ears."

The floppy ears she chose today were made of sheer white linen, with a fringe of golden tassels. With Jhiqui's help, she wound the *tokar* about herself correctly on her third attempt. Irri fetched her crown, wrought in the shape of the three-headed dragon of her House. Its coils were gold, its wings silver, its three heads ivory, onyx, and jade. Dany's neck and shoulders would be stiff and sore from the weight of it before the day was done. *A crown should not sit easy on the head.* One of her royal forebears had said that, once. *Some Aegon, but which one?* Five Aegons had ruled the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. There would have been a sixth, but the Usurper's dogs had murdered her brother's son when he was still a babe at the breast. *If he had lived, I might have married him. Aegon would have been closer to my age than Viserys.* Dany had only been conceived when Aegon and his sister were murdered. Their father, her brother Rhaegar, perished even earlier, slain by the Usurper on the Trident. Her brother Viserys had died screaming in Vaes Dothrak with a crown of molten gold upon his head. *They will kill me too if I allow it. The knives that slew my Stalwart Shield were meant for me.*

She had not forgotten the slave children the Great Masters had nailed up along the road from Yunkai. They had numbered one hundred sixty-three, a child every mile, nailed to mileposts with one arm outstretched to point her way. After Meereen had fallen, Dany had nailed up a like number of Great Masters. Swarms of flies had attended their slow dying, and the stench had lingered long in the plaza. Yet some days she feared that she had not gone far enough. These Meereenese were a sly and stubborn people who resisted

her at every turn. They had freed their slaves, yes ... only to hire them back as servants at wages so meagre that most could scarce afford to eat. Those too old or young to be of use had been cast into the streets, along with the infirm and the crippled. And still the Great Masters gathered atop their lofty pyramids to complain of how the dragon queen had filled their noble city with hordes of unwashed beggars, thieves, and whores.

To rule Meereen I must win the Meereenese, however much I may despise them. “I am ready,” she told Irri.

Reznak and Skahaz waited atop the marble steps. “Great queen,” declared Reznak mo Reznak, “you are so radiant today I fear to look on you.” The seneschal wore a *tokar* of maroon silk with a golden fringe. A small, damp man, he smelled as if he had bathed in perfume and spoke a bastard form of High Valyrian, much corrupted and flavored with a thick Ghiscari growl.

“You are kind to say so,” Dany answered, in the same tongue.

“My queen,” growled Skahaz mo Kandaq, of the shaven head. Ghiscari hair was dense and wiry; it had long been the fashion for the men of the Slaver Cities to tease it into horns and spikes and wings. By shaving, Skahaz had put old Meereen behind him to accept the new, and his kin had done the same after his example. Others followed, though whether from fear, fashion, or ambition, Dany could not say; shavepates, they were called. Skahaz was *the* Shavepate ... and the vilest of traitors to the Sons of the Harpy and their ilk. “We were told about the eunuch.”

“His name was Stalwart Shield.”

“More will die unless the murderers are punished.” Even with his shaven scalp, Skahaz had an odious face—a beetled brow, small eyes with heavy bags beneath them, a big nose dark with blackheads, oily skin that looked more yellow than the usual amber of Ghiscari. It was a blunt, brutal, angry face. She could only pray it was an honest one as well.

“How can I punish them when I do not know who they are?” Dany demanded of him. “Tell me that, bold Skahaz.”

“You have no lack of enemies, Your Grace. You can see their pyramids from your terrace. Zhak, Hazkar, Ghazeen, Merreq, Loraq, all the old slaving families. Pahl. Pahl, most of all. A house of women now. Bitter old women with a taste for blood. Women do not forget. Women do not forgive.”

No, Dany thought, *and the Usurper’s dogs will learn that, when I return to Westeros*. It was true that there was blood between her and the House of Pahl. Oznak zo Pahl had been cut down by Strong Belwas in single combat. His father, commander of Meereen’s city watch, had died defending the gates when Joso’s Cock smashed them into splinters. Three uncles had been among the hundred sixty-three on the plaza. “How much gold have we offered for information concerning the Sons of the Harpy?” Dany asked.

“One hundred honors, if it please Your Radiance.”

“One thousand honors would please us more. Make it so.”

“Your Grace has not asked for my counsel,” said Skahaz Shavepate, “but I say that blood must pay for blood. Take one man from each of the families I have named and kill him. The next time one of yours is slain, take two from each great House and kill them both. There will not be a third murder.”

Reznak squealed in distress. “Noooo ... gentle queen, such savagery would bring down the ire of the gods. We will find the murderers, I promise you, and when we do they will prove to be baseborn filth, you shall see.”

The seneschal was as bald as Skahaz, though in his case the gods were responsible. “Should any hair be so insolent as to appear, my barber stands with razor ready,” he had assured her when she raised him up. There were times when Dany wondered if that razor might not be better saved for Reznak’s throat. He was a useful man, but she liked him little and trusted him less. The Undying of Qarth had told her she would be thrice betrayed. Mirri Maz Duur had been the first, Ser Jorah the second. Would Reznak be the third? The Shavepate? Daario? *Or will it be someone I would never suspect, Ser Barristan or Grey Worm or Missandei?*

“Skahaz,” she told the Shavepate, “I thank you for your counsel. Reznak, see what one thousand honors may accomplish.” Clutching her *tokar*, Daenerys swept past them down the broad marble stair. She took one step at a time, lest she trip over her fringe and go tumbling headfirst into court.

Missandei announced her. The little scribe had a sweet, strong voice. “*All kneel for Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Shackles, and Mother of Dragons.*”

The hall had filled. Unsullied stood with their backs to the pillars, holding shields and spears, the spikes on their caps jutting upward like a row of knives. The Meereenese had gathered beneath the eastern windows. Her freedmen stood well apart from their former masters. *Until they stand together, Meereen will know no peace.* “Arise.” Dany settled onto her bench. The hall rose. *That at least they do as one.*

Reznak mo Reznak had a list. Custom demanded that the queen begin with the Astapori envoy, a former slave who called himself Lord Ghael, though no one seemed to know what he was lord of.

Lord Ghael had a mouth of brown and rotten teeth and the pointed yellow face of a weasel. He also had a gift. “Cleon the Great sends these slippers as a token of his love for Daenerys Stormborn, the Mother of Dragons.”

Irri slid the slippers onto Dany’s feet. They were gilded leather, decorated with green freshwater pearls. *Does the butcher king believe a pair of pretty slippers will win my hand?* “King Cleon is most generous. You may thank him for his lovely gift.” *Lovely, but made for a child.* Dany had small feet, yet the pointed slippers mashed her toes together.

“Great Cleon will be pleased to know they pleased you,” said Lord Ghael. “His Magnificence bids me say that he stands ready to defend the Mother of Dragons from all her foes.”

If he proposes again that I wed King Cleon, I’ll throw a slipper at his head, Dany thought, but for once the Astapori envoy made no mention of a royal marriage. Instead he said, “The time has come for Astapor and Meereen to

end the savage reign of the Wise Masters of Yunkai, who are sworn foes to all those who live in freedom. Great Cleon bids me tell you that he and his new Unsullied will soon march.”

His new Unsullied are an obscene jape. “King Cleon would be wise to tend his own gardens and let the Yunkai’i tend theirs.” It was not that Dany harbored any love for Yunkai. She was coming to regret leaving the Yellow City untaken after defeating its army in the field. The Wise Masters had returned to slaving as soon as she moved on, and were busy raising levies, hiring sellswords, and making alliances against her.

Cleon the self-styled Great was no better, however. The Butcher King had restored slavery to Astapor, the only change being that the former slaves were now the masters and the former masters were now the slaves.

“I am only a young girl and know little of the ways of war,” she told Lord Ghael, “but we have heard that Astapor is starving. Let King Cleon feed his people before he leads them out to battle.” She made a gesture of dismissal. Ghael withdrew.

“Magnificence,” prompted Reznak mo Reznak, “will you hear the noble Hizdahr zo Loraq?”

Again? Dany nodded, and Hizdahr strode forth; a tall man, very slender, with flawless amber skin. He bowed on the same spot where Stalwart Shield had lain in death not long before. *I need this man*, Dany reminded herself. Hizdahr was a wealthy merchant with many friends in Meereen, and more across the seas. He had visited Volantis, Lys, and Qarth, had kin in Tolos and Elyria, and was even said to wield some influence in New Ghis, where the Yunkai’i were trying to stir up enmity against Dany and her rule.

And he was rich. Famously and fabulously rich ...

And like to grow richer, if I grant his petition. When Dany had closed the city’s fighting pits, the value of pit shares had plummeted. Hizdahr zo Loraq had grabbed them up with both hands, and now owned most of the fighting pits in Meereen.

The nobleman had wings of wiry red-black hair sprouting from his temples. They made him look as if his head were about to take flight. His long face was made even longer by a beard bound with rings of gold. His purple *tokar* was fringed with amethysts and pearls. “Your Radiance will know the reason I am here.”

“Why, it must be because you have no other purpose but to plague me. How many times have I refused you?”

“Five times, Your Magnificence.”

“Six now. I will not have the fighting pits reopened.”

“If Your Majesty will hear my arguments ...”

“I have. Five times. Have you brought new arguments?”

“Old arguments,” Hizdahr admitted, “new words. Lovely words, and courteous, more apt to move a queen.”

“It is your cause I find wanting, not your courtesies. I have heard your arguments so often I could plead your case myself. Shall I?” Dany leaned forward. “The fighting pits have been a part of Meereen since the city was founded. The combats are profoundly religious in nature, a blood sacrifice to the gods of Ghis. The *mortal art* of Ghis is not mere butchery but a display of courage, skill, and strength most pleasing to your gods. Victorious fighters are pampered and acclaimed, and the slain are honored and remembered. By reopening the pits I would show the people of Meereen that I respect their ways and customs. The pits are far-famed across the world. They draw trade to Meereen, and fill the city’s coffers with coin from the ends of the earth. All men share a taste for blood, a taste the pits help slake. In that way they make Meereen more tranquil. For criminals condemned to die upon the sands, the pits represent a judgment by battle, a last chance for a man to prove his innocence.” She leaned back again, with a toss of her head. “There. How have I done?”

“Your Radiance has stated the case much better than I could have hoped to do myself. I see that you are eloquent as well as beautiful. I am quite

persuaded.”

She had to laugh. “Ah, but I am not.”

“Your Magnificence,” whispered Reznak to Reznak in her ear, “it is customary for the city to claim one-tenth of all the profits from the fighting pits, after expenses, as a tax. That coin might be put to many noble uses.”

“It might ... though if we *were* to reopen the pits, we should take our tenth *before* expenses. I am only a young girl and know little of such matters, but I dwelt with Xaro Xhoan Daxos long enough to learn that much.

Hizdahr, if you could marshal armies as you marshal arguments, you could conquer the world ... but my answer is still *no*. For the sixth time.”

“The queen has spoken.” He bowed again, as deeply as before. His pearls and amethysts clattered softly against the marble floor. A very limber man was Hizdahr zo Loraq.

He might be handsome, but for that silly hair. Reznak and the Green Grace had been urging Dany to take a Meereenese noble for her husband, to reconcile the city to her rule. Hizdahr zo Loraq might be worth a careful look. *Sooner him than Skahaz.* The Shavepate had offered to set aside his wife for her, but the notion made her shudder. Hizdahr at least knew how to smile.

“Magnificence,” said Reznak, consulting his list, “the noble Grazdan zo Galare would address you. Will you hear him?”

“It would be my pleasure,” said Dany, admiring the glimmer of the gold and the sheen of the green pearls on Cleon’s slippers while doing her best to ignore the pinching in her toes. Grazdan, she had been forewarned, was a cousin of the Green Grace, whose support she had found invaluable. The priestess was a voice for peace, acceptance, and obedience to lawful authority. *I can give her cousin a respectful hearing, whatever he desires.*

What he desired turned out to be gold. Dany had refused to compensate any of the Great Masters for the value of their slaves, but the Meereenese kept

devising other ways to squeeze coin from her. The noble Grazdan had once owned a slave woman who was a very fine weaver, it seemed; the fruits of her loom were greatly valued, not only in Meereen, but in New Ghis and Astapor and Qarth. When this woman had grown old, Grazdan had purchased half a dozen young girls and commanded the crone to instruct them in the secrets of her craft. The old woman was dead now. The young ones, freed, had opened a shop by the harbor wall to sell their weavings. Grazdan zo Galare asked that he be granted a portion of their earnings. "They owe their skill to me," he insisted. "I plucked them from the auction bloc and gave them to the loom."

Dany listened quietly, her face still. When he was done, she said, "What was the name of the old weaver?"

"The slave?" Grazdan shifted his weight, frowning. "She was ... Elza, it might have been. Or Ella. It was six years ago she died. I have owned so many slaves, Your Grace."

"Let us say Elza. Here is our ruling. From the girls, you shall have nothing. It was Elza who taught them weaving, not you. From you, the girls shall have a new loom, the finest coin can buy. That is for forgetting the name of the old woman."

Reznak would have summoned another *tokar* next, but Dany insisted that he call upon a freedman. Thereafter she alternated between the former masters and the former slaves. Many and more of the matters brought before her involved redress. Meereen had been sacked savagely after its fall. The stepped pyramids of the mighty had been spared the worst of the ravages, but the humbler parts of the city had been given over to an orgy of looting and killing as the city's slaves rose up and the starving hordes who had followed her from Yunkai and Astapor poured through the broken gates. Her Unsullied had finally restored order, but the sack left a plague of problems in its wake. And so they came to see the queen.

A rich woman came, whose husband and sons had died defending the city walls. During the sack she had fled to her brother in fear. When she returned, she found her house had been turned into a brothel. The whores had bedecked themselves in her jewels and clothes. She wanted her house

back, and her jewels. “They can keep the clothes,” she allowed. Dany granted her the jewels but ruled the house was lost when she abandoned it.

A former slave came, to accuse a certain noble of the Zhak. The man had recently taken to wife a freedwoman who had been the noble’s bed-warmer before the city fell. The noble had taken her maidenhood, used her for his pleasure, and gotten her with child. Her new husband wanted the noble gelded for the crime of rape, and he wanted a purse of gold as well, to pay him for raising the noble’s bastard as his own. Dany granted him the gold, but not the gelding. “When he lay with her, your wife was his property, to do with as he would. By law, there was no rape.” Her decision did not please him, she could see, but if she gelded every man who ever forced a bedslave, she would soon rule a city of eunuchs.

A boy came, younger than Dany, slight and scarred, dressed up in a frayed grey *tokar* trailing silver fringe. His voice broke when he told of how two of his father’s household slaves had risen up the night the gate broke. One had slain his father, the other his elder brother. Both had raped his mother before killing her as well. The boy had escaped with no more than the scar upon his face, but one of the murderers was still living in his father’s house, and the other had joined the queen’s soldiers as one of the Mother’s Men. He wanted them both hanged.

I am queen over a city built on dust and death. Dany had no choice but to deny him. She had declared a blanket pardon for all crimes committed during the sack. Nor would she punish slaves for rising up against their masters.

When she told him, the boy rushed at her, but his feet tangled in his *tokar* and he went sprawling headlong on the purple marble. Strong Belwas was on him at once. The huge brown eunuch yanked him up one-handed and shook him like a mastiff with a rat. “Enough, Belwas,” Dany called. “Release him.” To the boy she said, “Treasure that *tokar*, for it saved your life. You are only a boy, so we will forget what happened here. You should do the same.” But as he left the boy looked back over his shoulder, and when she saw his eyes Dany thought, *The Harpy has another Son.*

By midday Daenerys was feeling the weight of the crown upon her head, and the hardness of the bench beneath her. With so many still waiting on her pleasure, she did not stop to eat. Instead she dispatched Jhiqui to the kitchens for a platter of flatbread, olives, figs, and cheese. She nibbled whilst she listened, and sipped from a cup of watered wine. The figs were fine, the olives even finer, but the wine left a tart metallic aftertaste in her mouth. The small pale yellow grapes native to these regions produced a notably inferior vintage. *We shall have no trade in wine.* Besides, the Great Masters had burned the best arbors along with the olive trees.

In the afternoon a sculptor came, proposing to replace the head of the great bronze harpy in the Plaza of Purification with one cast in Dany's image. She denied him with as much courtesy as she could muster. A pike of unprecedented size had been caught in the Skahazadhan, and the fisherman wished to give it to the queen. She admired the fish extravagantly, rewarded the fisherman with a purse of silver, and sent the pike to her kitchens. A coppersmith had fashioned her a suit of burnished rings to wear to war. She accepted it with fulsome thanks; it was lovely to behold, and all that burnished copper would flash prettily in the sun, though if actual battle threatened, she would sooner be clad in steel. Even a young girl who knew nothing of the ways of war knew *that*.

The slippers the Butcher King had sent her had grown too uncomfortable. Dany kicked them off and sat with one foot tucked beneath her and the other swinging back and forth. It was not a very regal pose, but she was tired of being regal. The crown had given her a headache, and her buttocks had gone to sleep. "Ser Barristan," she called, "I know what quality a king needs most."

"Courage, Your Grace?"

"Cheeks like iron," she teased. "All I do is sit."

"Your Grace takes too much on herself. You should allow your councillors to shoulder more of your burdens."

"I have too many councillors and too few cushions." Dany turned to Reznak. "How many more?"

” Three-and-twenty, if it please Your Magnificence. With as many claims.” The seneschal consulted some papers. “One calf and three goats. The rest will be sheep or lambs, no doubt.”

” Three-and-twenty.” Dany sighed. “My dragons have developed a prodigious taste for mutton since we began to pay the shepherds for their kills. Have these claims been proven?”

“Some men have brought burnt bones.”

“Men make fires. Men cook mutton. Burnt bones prove nothing. Brown Ben says there are red wolves in the hills outside the city, and jack-als and wild dogs. Must we pay good silver for every lamb that goes astray between Yunkai and the Skahazadhan?”

“No, Magnificence.” Reznak bowed. “Shall I send these rascals away, or will you want them scourged?”

Daenerys shifted on the bench. “No man should ever fear to come to me.” Some claims were false, she did not doubt, but more were genuine. Her dragons had grown too large to be content with rats and cats and dogs. *The more they eat, the larger they will grow*, Ser Barristan had warned her, *and the larger they grow, the more they’ll eat*. Drogon especially ranged far afield and could easily devour a sheep a day. “Pay them for the value of their animals,” she told Reznak, “but henceforth claimants must present themselves at the Temple of the Graces and swear a holy oath before the gods of Ghis.”

“It shall be done.” Reznak turned to the petitioners. “Her Magnificence the Queen has consented to compensate each of you for the animals you have lost,” he told them in the Ghiscari tongue. “Present yourselves to my factors on the morrow, and you shall be paid in coin or kind, as you prefer.”

The pronouncement was received in sullen silence. *You would think they might be happier*, Dany thought. *They have what they came for. Is there no way to please these people?*

One man lingered behind as the rest were filing out—a squat man with a windburnt face, shabbily dressed. His hair was a cap of coarse red-black wire cropped about his ears, and in one hand he held a sad cloth sack. He stood with his head down, gazing at the marble floor as if he had quite forgotten where he was. *And what does this one want?* Dany wondered.

“All kneel for Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Shackles, and Mother of Dragons,” cried Missandei in her high, sweet voice.

As Dany stood, her *tokar* began to slip. She caught it and tugged it back in place. “You with the sack,” she called, “did you wish to speak with us? You may approach.”

When he raised his head, his eyes were red and raw as open sores. Dany glimpsed Ser Barristan sliding closer, a white shadow at her side. The man approached in a stumbling shuffle, one step and then another, clutching his sack. *Is he drunk, or ill?* she wondered. There was dirt beneath his cracked yellow fingernails.

“What is it?” Dany asked. “Do you have some grievance to lay before us, some petition? What would you have of us?”

His tongue flicked nervously over chapped, cracked lips. “I ... I brought ...”

“Bones?” she said, impatiently. “Burnt bones?”

He lifted the sack, and spilled its contents on the marble.

Bones they were, broken bones and blackened. The longer ones had been cracked open for their marrow.

“It were the black one,” the man said, in a Ghiscari growl, “the winged shadow. He come down from the sky and ... and ...”

No. Dany shivered. *No, no, oh no.*

“Are you deaf, fool?” Reznak mo Reznak demanded of the man. “Did you not hear my pronouncement? See my factors on the morrow, and you shall be paid for your sheep.”

“Reznak,” Ser Barristan said quietly, “hold your tongue and open your eyes. Those are no sheep bones.”

No, Dany thought, those are the bones of a child.