

## DAENERYS

She was breaking her fast on a bowl of cold shrimp-and-persimmon soup when Irri brought her a Qartheen gown, an airy confection of ivory samite patterned with seed pearls. “Take it away,” Dany said. “The docks are no place for lady’s finery.”

If the Milk Men thought her such a savage, she would dress the part for them. When she went to the stables, she wore faded sandsilk pants and woven grass sandals. Her small breasts moved freely beneath a painted Dothraki vest, and a curved dagger hung from her medallion belt. Jhiqui had braided her hair Dothraki fashion, and fastened a silver bell to the end of the braid. “I have won no victories,” she tried telling her handmaid when the bell tinkled softly.

Jhiqui disagreed. “You burned the *maegi* in their house of dust and sent their souls to hell.”

*That was Drogon’s victory, not mine*, Dany wanted to say, but she held her tongue. The Dothraki would esteem her all the more for a few bells in her hair. She chimed as she mounted her silver mare, and again with every stride, but neither Ser Jorah nor her bloodriders made mention of it. To guard her people and her dragons in her absence, she chose Rakharo. Jhogo and Aggo would ride with her to the waterfront.

They left the marble palaces and fragrant gardens behind and made their way through a poorer part of the city where modest brick houses turned blind walls to the street. There were fewer horses and camels to be seen, and a dearth of palanquins, but the streets teemed with children, beggars, and skinny dogs the color of sand. Pale men in dusty linen skirts stood beneath arched doorways to watch them pass. *They know who I am, and they do not love me*. Dany could tell from the way they looked at her.

Ser Jorah would sooner have tucked her inside her palanquin, safely hidden behind silken curtains, but she refused him. She had reclined too

long on satin cushions, letting oxen bear her hither and yon. At least when she rode she felt as though she was getting somewhere.

It was not by choice that she sought the waterfront. She was fleeing again. Her whole life had been one long flight, it seemed. She had begun running in her mother's womb, and never once stopped. How often had she and Viserys stolen away in the black of night, a bare step ahead of the Usurper's hired knives? But it was run or die. Xaro had learned that Pyat Pree was gathering the surviving warlocks together to work ill on her.

Dany had laughed when he told her. "Was it not you who told me warlocks were no more than old soldiers, vainly boasting of forgotten deeds and lost prowess?"

Xaro looked troubled. "And so it was, then. But now? I am less certain. It is said that the glass candles are burning in the house of Urrathon Night-Walker, that have not burned in a hundred years. Ghost grass grows in the Garden of Gehane, phantom tortoises have been seen carrying messages between the windowless houses on Warlock's Way, and all the rats in the city are chewing off their tails. The wife of Mathos Mallarawan, who once mocked a warlock's drab moth-eaten robe, has gone mad and will wear no clothes at all. Even fresh-washed silks make her feel as though a thousand insects were crawling on her skin. And Blind Sybassion the Eater of Eyes can see again, or so his slaves do swear. A man must wonder." He sighed. "These are strange times in Qarth. And strange times are bad for trade. It grieves me to say so, yet it might be best if you left Qarth entirely, and sooner rather than later." Xaro stroked her fingers reassuringly. "You need not go alone, though. You have seen dark visions in the Palace of Dust, but Xaro has dreamed brighter dreams. I see you happily abed, with our child at your breast. Sail with me around the Jade Sea, and we can yet make it so! It is not too late. Give me a son, my sweet song of joy!"

*Give you a dragon, you mean.* "I will not wed you, Xaro."

His face had grown cold at that. "Then go."

"But where?"

"Somewhere far from here."

Well, perhaps it was time. The people of her *khalasar* had welcomed the chance to recover from the ravages of the red waste, but now that they were plump and rested once again, they began to grow unruly. Dothraki were not accustomed to staying long in one place. They were a warrior people, not made for cities. Perhaps she had lingered in Qarth too long, seduced by its comforts and its beauties. It was a city that always promised more than it would give you, it seemed to her, and her welcome here had turned sour since the House of the Undying had collapsed in a great gout of smoke and flame. Overnight the Qartheen had come to remember that dragons were *dangerous*. No longer did they vie with each other to give her gifts. Instead the Tourmaline Brotherhood had called openly for her expulsion, and the Ancient Guild of Spicers for her death. It was all Xaro could do to keep the Thirteen from joining them.

*But where am I to go?* Ser Jorah proposed that they journey farther east, away from her enemies in the Seven Kingdoms. Her bloodriders would sooner have returned to their great grass sea, even if it meant braving the red waste again. Dany herself had toyed with the idea of settling in Vaes Tolorro until her dragons grew great and strong. But her heart was full of doubts. Each of these felt wrong, somehow... and even when she decided where to go, the question of how she would get there remained troublesome.

Xaro Xhoan Daxos would be no help to her, she knew that now. For all his professions of devotion, he was playing his own game, not unlike Pyat Pree. The night he asked her to leave, Dany had begged one last favor of him. "An army, is it?" Xaro asked. "A kettle of gold? A galley, perhaps?"

Dany blushed. She hated begging. "A ship, yes."

Xaro's eyes had glittered as brightly as the jewels in his nose. "I am a trader, *Khaleesi*. So perhaps we should speak no more of giving, but rather of trade. For one of your dragons, you shall have ten of the finest ships in my fleet. You need only say that one sweet word."

"No," she said.

"Alas," Xaro sobbed, "that was not the word I meant."

"Would you ask a mother to sell one of her children?"

“Whyever not? They can always make more. Mothers sell their children every day.”

“Not the Mother of Dragons.”

“Not even for twenty ships?”

“Not for a hundred.”

His mouth curled downward. “I do not have a hundred. But you have three dragons. Grant me one, for all my kindnesses. You will still have two and thirty ships as well.”

Thirty ships would be enough to land a small army on the shore of Westeros. *But I do not have a small army.* “How many ships do you own, Xaro?”

“Eighty-three, if one does not count my pleasure barge.”

“And your colleagues in the Thirteen?”

“Among us all, perhaps a thousand.”

“And the Spicers and the Tourmaline Brotherhood?”

“Their trifling fleets are of no account.”

“Even so,” she said, “tell me.”

“Twelve or thirteen hundred for the Spicers. No more than eight hundred for the Brotherhood.”

“And the Asshai’i, the Braavosi, the Summer Islanders, the Ibbenese, and all the other peoples who sail the great salt sea, how many ships do they have? All together?”

“Many and more,” he said irritably. “What does this matter?”

“I am trying to set a price on one of the three living dragons in the world.” Dany smiled at him sweetly. “it seems to me that one-third of all the ships in the world would be fair.”

Xaro’s tears ran down his cheeks on either side of his jewel-encrusted nose. “Did I not warn you not to enter the Palace of Dust? This is the very thing I feared. The whispers of the warlocks have made you as mad as Mallarawan’s wife. A third of all the ships in the world? Pah. Pah, I say. Pah.”

Dany had not seen him since. His seneschal brought her messages, each cooler than the last. She must quit his house. He was done feeding her and her people. He demanded the return of his gifts, which she had accepted in bad faith. Her only consolation was that at least she'd had the great good sense not to marry him.

*The warlocks whispered of three treasons... once for blood and once for gold and once for love.* The first traitor was surely Mirri Maz Duur, who had murdered Khal Drogo and their unborn son to avenge her people. Could Pyat Pree and Xaro Xhoan Daxos be the second and the third? She did not think so. What Pyat did was not for gold, and Xaro had never truly loved her.

The streets grew emptier as they passed through a district given over to gloomy stone warehouses. Aggo went before her and Jhogo behind, leaving Ser Jorah Mormont at her side. Her bell rang softly, and Dany found her thoughts returning to the Palace of Dust once more, as the tongue returns to a space left by a missing tooth. *Child of three*, they had called her, *daughter of death, slayer of lies, bride of fire*. So many threes. Three fires, three mounts to ride, three treasons. "The dragon has three heads," she sighed. "Do you know what that means, Jorah?"

"Your Grace? The sigil of House Targaryen is a three-headed dragon, red on black."

"I know that. But there are no three-headed dragons."

"The three heads were Aegon and his sisters."

"Visenya and Rhaenys," she recalled. "I am descended from Aegon and Rhaenys through their son Aenys and their grandson Jaehaerys."

"Blue lips speak only lies, isn't that what Xaro told you? Why do you care what the warlocks whispered? All they wanted was to suck the life from you, you know that now."

"Perhaps," she said reluctantly. "Yet the things I saw..."

"A dead man in the prow of a ship, a blue rose, a banquet of blood... what does any of it mean, *Khaleesi*? A mummer's dragon, you said. What *is* a mummer's dragon, pray?"

“A cloth dragon on poles,” Dany explained. “Mummers use them in their follies, to give the heroes something to fight.”

Ser Jorah frowned.

Dany could not let it go. “*His is the song of ice and fire*, my brother said. I’m certain it was my brother. Not Viserys, Rhaegar. He had a harp with silver strings.”

Ser Jorah’s frown deepened until his eyebrows came together. “Prince Rhaegar played such a harp,” he conceded. “You saw him?”

She nodded. “There was a woman in a bed with a babe at her breast. My brother said the babe was the prince that was promised and told her to name him Aegon.”

“Prince Aegon was Rhaegar’s heir by Elia of Dorne,” Ser Jorah said. “But if he was this prince that was promised, the promise was broken along with his skull when the Lannisters dashed his head against a wall.”

“I remember,” Dany said sadly. “They murdered Rhaegar’s daughter as well, the little princess. Rhaenys, she was named, like Aegon’s sister. There was no Visenya, but he said the dragon has three heads. What is the song of ice and fire?”

“It’s no song I’ve ever heard.”

“I went to the warlocks hoping for answers, but instead they’ve left me with a hundred new questions.”

By then there were people in the streets once more. “Make way,” Aggo shouted, while Jhogo sniffed at the air suspiciously. “I smell it, *Khaleesi*,” he called. “The poison water.” The Dothraki distrusted the sea and all that moved upon it. Water that a horse could not drink was water they wanted no part of. *They will learn*, Dany resolved. *I braved their sea with Khal Drogo. Now they can brave mine.*

Qarth was one of the world’s great ports, its great sheltered harbor a riot of color and clangor and strange smells. Winesinks, warehouses, and gaming dens lined the streets, cheek by jowl with cheap brothels and the temples of peculiar gods. Cutpurses, cutthroats, spellsellers, and moneychangers mingled with every crowd. The waterfront was one great

marketplace where the buying and selling went on all day and all night, and goods might be had for a fraction of what they cost at the bazaar, if a man did not ask where they came from. Wizen old women bent like hunchbacks sold flavored waters and goat's milk from glazed ceramic jugs strapped to their shoulders. Seamen from half a hundred nations wandered amongst the stalls, drinking spiced liquors and trading jokes in queer-sounding tongues. The air smelled of salt and frying fish, of hot tar and honey, of incense and oil and sperm.

Aggo gave an urchin a copper for a skewer of honey-roasted mice and nibbled them as he rode. Jhogo bought a handful of fat white cherries. Elsewhere they saw beautiful bronze daggers for sale, dried squids and carved onyx, a potent magical elixir made of virgin's milk and shade of the evening, even dragon's eggs which looked suspiciously like painted rocks.

As they passed the long stone quays reserved for the ships of the Thirteen, she saw chests of saffron, frankincense, and pepper being off-loaded from Xaro's ornate *Vermillion Kiss*. Beside her, casks of wine, bales of sourleaf, and pallets of striped hides were being trundled up the gangplank onto the *Bride in Azure*, to sail on the evening tide. Farther along, a crowd had gathered around the Spicer galley *Sunblaze* to bid on slaves. It was well known that the cheapest place to buy a slave was right off the ship, and the banners floating from her masts proclaimed that the *Sunblaze* had just arrived from Astapor on Slaver's Bay.

Dany would get no help from the Thirteen, the Tourmaline Brotherhood, or the Ancient Guild of Spicers. She rode her silver past several miles of their quays, docks, and storehouses, all the way out to the far end of the horseshoe-shaped harbor where the ships from the Summer Islands, Westeros, and the Nine Free Cities were permitted to dock.

She dismounted beside a gaming pit where a basilisk was tearing a big red dog to pieces amidst a shouting ring of sailors. "Aggo, Jhogo, you will guard the horses while Ser Jorah and I speak to the captains."

"As you say, *Khaleesi*. We will watch you as you go."

It was good to hear men speaking Valyrian once more, and even the Common Tongue, Dany thought as they approached the first ship. Sailors,

dockworkers, and merchants alike gave way before her, not knowing what to make of this slim young girl with silver-gold hair who dressed in the Dothraki fashion and walked with a knight at her side. Despite the heat of the day, Ser Jorah wore his green wool surcoat over chainmail, the black bear of Mormont sewn on his chest.

But neither her beauty nor his size and strength would serve with the men whose ships they needed.

“You require passage for a hundred Dothraki, all their horses, yourself and this knight, and three *dragons*?” said the captain of the great cog *Ardent Friend* before he walked away laughing. When she told a Lyseni on the *Trumpeteer* that she was Daenerys Stormborn, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, he gave her a deadface look and said, “Aye, and I’m Lord Tywin Lannister and shit gold every night.” The cargomaster of the Myrish galley *Silken Spirit* opined that dragons were too dangerous at sea, where any stray breath of flame might set the rigging afire. The owner of *Lord Faro’s Belly* would risk dragons, but not Dothraki. “I’ll have no such godless savages in my *Belly*, I’ll not.” The two brothers who captained the sister ships *Quicksilver* and *Greyhound* seemed sympathetic and invited them into the cabin for a glass of Arbor red. They were so courteous that Dany was hopeful for a time, but in the end the price they asked was far beyond her means, and might have been beyond Xaro’s. *Pinchbottom Petto* and *Sloe-Eyed Maid* were too small for her needs, *Bravo* was bound for the Jade Sea, and *Magister Manolo* scarce looked seaworthy.

As they made their way toward the next quay, Ser Jorah laid a hand against the small of her back. “Your Grace. You are being followed. No, do not turn.” He guided her gently toward a brass-seller’s booth. “This is a noble work, my queen,” he proclaimed loudly, lifting a large platter for her inspection. “See how it shines in the sun?”

The brass was polished to a high sheen. Dany could see her face in it... and when Ser Jorah angled it to the right, she could see behind her. “I see a fat brown man and an older man with a staff. Which is it?”

“Both of them,” Ser Jorah said. “They have been following us since we left *Quicksilver*.”



The ripples in the brass stretched the strangers queerly, making one man seem long and gaunt, the other immensely squat and broad. “A most excellent brass, great lady,” the merchant exclaimed. “Bright as the sun! And for the Mother of Dragons, only thirty honors.”

The platter was worth no more than three. “Where are my guards?” Dany declared. “This man is trying to rob me!” For Jorah, she lowered her voice and spoke in the Common Tongue. “They may not mean me ill. Men have looked at women since time began, perhaps it is no more than that.”

The brass-seller ignored their whispers. “Thirty? Did I say thirty? Such a fool I am. The price is twenty honors.”

“All the brass in this booth is not worth twenty honors,” Dany told him as she studied the reflections. The old man had the look of Westeros about him, and the brown-skinned one must weigh twenty stone. *The Usurper offered a lordship to the man who kills me, and these two are far from home. Or could they be creatures of the warlocks, meant to take me unawares?*

“Ten, *Khaleesi*, because you are so lovely. Use it for a looking glass. Only brass this fine could capture such beauty.”

“It might serve to carry nightsoil. If you threw it away, I might pick it up, so long as I did not need to stoop. But *pay* for it?” Dany shoved the platter back into his hands. “Worms have crawled up your nose and eaten your wits.”

“Eight honors,” he cried. “My wives will beat me and call me fool, but I am a helpless child in your hands. Come, eight, that is less than it is worth.”

“What do I need with dull brass when Xaro Xhoan Daxos feeds me off plates of gold?” As she turned to walk off, Dany let her glance sweep over the strangers. The brown man was near as wide as he’d looked in the platter, with a gleaming bald head and the smooth cheeks of a eunuch. A long curving *arakh* was thrust through the sweat-stained yellow silk of his bellyband. Above the silk, he was naked but for an absurdly tiny iron-studded vest. Old scars crisscrossed his tree-trunk arms, huge chest, and massive belly, pale against his nut-brown skin.

The other man wore a traveler's cloak of undyed wool, the hood thrown back. Long white hair fell to his shoulders, and a silky white beard covered the lower half of his face. He leaned his weight on a hardwood staff as tall as he was. *Only fools would stare so openly if they meant me harm.* All the same, it might be prudent to head back toward Jhogo and Aggo. "The old man does not wear a sword," she said to Jorah in the Common Tongue as she drew him away.

The brass merchant came hopping after them. "Five honors, for five it is yours, it was meant for you."

Ser Jorah said, "A hardwood staff can crack a skull as well as any mace."

"Four! I know you want it!" He danced in front of them, scampering backward as he thrust the platter at their faces.

"Do they follow?"

"Lift that up a little higher," the knight told the merchant. "Yes. The old man pretends to linger at a potter's stall, but the brown one has eyes only for you."

"Two honors! Two! Two!" The merchant was panting heavily from the effort of running backward.

"Pay him before he kills himself," Dany told Ser Jorah, wondering what she was going to do with a huge brass platter. She turned back as he reached for his coins, intending to put an end to this mummer's farce. The blood of the dragon would not be herded through the bazaar by an old man and a fat eunuch.

A Qartheen stepped into her path. "Mother of Dragons, for you." He knelt and thrust a jewel box into her face.

Dany took it almost by reflex. The box was carved wood, its mother-of-pearl lid inlaid with jasper and chalcedony. "You are too generous." She opened it. Within was a glittering green scarab carved from onyx and emerald. *Beautiful*, she thought. *This will help pay for our passage.* As she reached inside the box, the man said, "I am so sorry," but she hardly heard.

The scarab unfolded with a hiss.

Dany caught a glimpse of a malign black face, almost human, and an arched tail dripping venom... and then the box flew from her hand in pieces, turning end over end. Sudden pain twisted her fingers. As she cried out and clutched her hand, the brass merchant let out a shriek, a woman screamed, and suddenly the Qartheen were shouting and pushing each other aside. Ser Jorah slammed past her, and Dany stumbled to one knee. She heard the *hiss* again. The old man drove the butt of his staff into the ground, Aggo came riding through an eggseller's stall and vaulted from his saddle, Jhogo's whip cracked overhead, Ser Jorah slammed the eunuch over the head with the brass platter, sailors and whores and merchants were fleeing or shouting or both...

"Your Grace, a thousand pardons." The old man knelt. "It's dead. Did I break your hand?"

She closed her fingers, wincing. "I don't think so."

"I had to knock it away," he started, but her bloodriders were on him before he could finish. Aggo kicked his staff away and Jhogo seized him round the shoulders, forced him to his knees, and pressed a dagger to his throat. "*Khaleesi*, we saw him strike you. Would you see the color of his blood?"

"Release him." Dany climbed to her feet. "Look at the bottom of his staff, blood of my blood." Ser Jorah had been shoved off his feet by the eunuch. She ran between them as *arakh* and longsword both came flashing from their sheaths. "Put down your steel! Stop it!"

"Your Grace?" Mormont lowered his sword only an inch. "These men attacked you."

"They were defending me." Dany snapped her hand to shake the sting from her fingers. "It was the other one, the Qartheen." When she looked around he was gone. "He was a Sorrowful Man. There was a mantichore in that jewel box he gave me. This man knocked it out of my hand." The brass merchant was still rolling on the ground. She went to him and helped him to his feet. "Were you stung?"

"No, good lady," he said, shaking, "or else I would be dead. But it touched me, *aieeee*, when it fell from the box it landed on my arm." He had

soiled himself, she saw, and no wonder.

She gave him a silver for his trouble and sent him on his way before she turned back to the old man with the white beard. “Who is it that I owe my life to?”

“You owe me nothing, Your Grace. I am called Arstan, though Belwas named me Whitebeard on the voyage here.” Though Jhogo had released him the old man remained on one knee. Aggo picked up his staff, turned it over, cursed softly in Dothraki, scraped the remains of the manticore off on a stone, and handed it back.

“And who is Belwas?” she asked.

The huge brown eunuch swaggered forward, sheathing his *arakh*. “I am Belwas. Strong Belwas they name me in the fighting pits of Meereen. Never did I lose.” He slapped his belly, covered with scars. “I let each man cut me once, before I kill him. Count the cuts and you will know how many Strong Belwas has slain.”

Dany had no need to count his scars; there were many, she could see at a glance. “And why are you here, Strong Belwas?”

“From Meereen I am sold to Qohor, and then to Pentos and the fat man with sweet stink in his hair. He it was who send Strong Belwas back across the sea, and old Whitebeard to serve him.”

*The fat man with sweet stink in his hair...* “Illyrio?” she said. “You were sent by Magister Illyrio?”

“We were, Your Grace,” old Whitebeard replied. “The Magister begs your kind indulgence for sending us in his stead, but he cannot sit a horse as he did in his youth, and sea travel upsets his digestion.” Earlier he had spoken in the Valyrian of the Free Cities, but now he changed to the Common Tongue. “I regret if we caused you alarm. If truth be told, we were not certain, we expected someone more... more...”

“Regal?” Dany laughed. She had no dragon with her, and her raiment was hardly queenly. “You speak the Common Tongue well, Arstan. Are you of Westeros?”

“I am. I was born on the Dornish Marches, Your Grace. As a boy I squired for a knight of Lord Swann’s household.” He held the tall staff upright beside him like a lance in need of a banner. “Now I squire for Belwas.”

“A bit old for such, aren’t you?” Ser Jorah had shouldered his way to her side, holding the brass platter awkwardly under his arm. Belwas’s hard head had left it badly bent.

“Not too old to serve my liege, Lord Mormont.”

“You know me as well?”

“I saw you fight a time or two. At Lannisport where you near unhorsed the Kingslayer. And on Pyke, there as well. You do not recall, Lord Mormont?”

Ser Jorah frowned. “Your face seems familiar, but there were hundreds at Lannisport and thousands on Pyke. And I am no lord. Bear Island was taken from me. I am but a knight.”

“A knight of my Queensguard.” Dany took his arm. “And my true friend and good counselor.” She studied Arstan’s face. He had a great dignity to him, a quiet strength she liked. “Rise, Arstan Whitebeard. Be welcome, Strong Belwas. Ser Jorah you know. Ko Aggo and Ko Jhogo are blood of my blood. They crossed the red waste with me, and saw my dragons born.”

“Horse boys.” Belwas grinned toothily. “Belwas has killed many horse boys in the fighting pits. They jingle when they die.”

Aggo’s *arakh* leapt to his hand. “Never have I killed a fat brown man. Belwas will be the first.”

“Sheath your steel, blood of my blood,” said Dany, “this man comes to serve me. Belwas, you will accord all respect to my people, or you will leave my service sooner than you’d wish, and with more scars than when you came.”

The gap-toothed smile faded from the giant’s broad brown face, replaced by a confused scowl. Men did not often threaten Belwas, it would seem, and less so girls a third his size.

Dany gave him a smile, to take a bit of the sting from the rebuke. “Now tell me, what would Magister Illyrio have of me, that he would send you all the way from Pentos?”

“He would have dragons,” said Belwas gruffly, “and the girl who makes them. He would have you.”

“Belwas has the truth of us, Your Grace,” said Arstan. “We were told to find you and bring you back to Pentos. The Seven Kingdoms have need of you. Robert the Usurper is dead, and the realm bleeds. When we set sail from Pentos there were four kings in the land, and no justice to be had.”

Joy bloomed in her heart, but Dany kept it from her face. “I have three dragons,” she said, “and more than a hundred in my *khalasar*, with all their goods and horses.”

“it is no matter,” boomed Belwas. “We take all. The fat man hires three ships for his little silverhair queen.”

“It is so, Your Grace,” Arstan Whitebeard said. “The great cog *Saduleon* is berthed at the end of the quay, and the galleys *Summer Sun* and *Joso’s Prank* are anchored beyond the breakwater.”

*Three heads has the dragon*, Dany thought, wondering. “I shall tell my people to make ready to depart at once. But the ships that bring me home must bear different names.”

“As you wish,” said Arstan. “What names would you prefer?”

“*Vhagar*,” Daenerys told him. “*Meraxes*. And *Balerion*. Paint the names on their hulls in golden letters three feet high, Arstan. I want every man who sees them to know the dragons are returned.”