

DAENERYS

The hill was a stony island in a sea of green.

It took Dany half the morning to climb down. By the time she reached the bottom she was winded. Her muscles ached, and she felt as if she had the beginnings of a fever. The rocks had scraped her hands raw. *They are better than they were, though*, she decided as she picked at a broken blister. Her skin was pink and tender, and a pale milky fluid was leaking from her cracked palms, but her burns were healing.

The hill loomed larger down here. Dany had taken to calling it Dragonstone, after the ancient citadel where she'd been born. She had no memories of that Dragonstone, but she would not soon forget this one. Scrub grass and thorny bushes covered its lower slopes; higher up a jagged tangle of bare rock thrust steep and sudden into the sky. There, amidst broken boulders, razor-sharp ridges, and needle spires, Drogon made his lair inside a shallow cave. He had dwelt there for some time, Dany had realized when she first saw the hill. The air smelled of ash, every rock and tree in sight was scorched and blackened, the ground strewn with burned and broken bones, yet it had been home to him.

Dany knew the lure of home.

Two days ago, climbing on a spire of rock, she had spied water to the south, a slender thread that glittered briefly as the sun was going down. *A stream*, Dany decided. Small, but it would lead her to a larger stream, and that stream would flow into some little river, and all the rivers in this part of the world were vassals of the Skahazadhan. Once she found the Skahazadhan she need only follow it downstream to Slaver's Bay.

She would sooner have returned to Meereen on dragon's wings, to be sure. But that was a desire Drogon did not seem to share.

The dragonlords of old Valyria had controlled their mounts with binding spells and sorcerous horns. Daenerys made do with a word and a whip.

Mounted on the dragon's back, she oft felt as if she were learning to ride all over again. When she whipped her silver mare on her right flank the mare went left, for a horse's first instinct is to flee from danger. When she laid the whip across Drogon's right side he veered right, for a dragon's first instinct is always to attack. Sometimes it did not seem to matter where she struck him, though; sometimes he went where he would and took her with him. Neither whip nor words could turn Drogon if he did not wish to be turned. The whip annoyed him more than it hurt him, she had come to see; his scales had grown harder than horn.

And no matter how far the dragon flew each day, come nightfall some instinct drew him home to Dragonstone. *His home, not mine.* Her home was back in Meereen, with her husband and her lover. That was where she belonged, surely.

Keep walking. If I look back I am lost.

Memories walked with her. Clouds seen from above. Horses small as ants thundering through the grass. A silver moon, almost close enough to touch. Rivers running bright and blue below, glimmering in the sun. *Will I ever see such sights again?* On Drogon's back she felt *whole*. Up in the sky the woes of this world could not touch her. How could she abandon that?

It was time, though. A girl might spend her life at play, but she was a woman grown, a queen, a wife, a mother to thousands. Her children had need of her. Drogon had bent before the whip, and so must she. She had to don her crown again and return to her ebon bench and the arms of her noble husband.

Hizdahr, of the tepid kisses.

The sun was hot this morning, the sky blue and cloudless. That was good. Dany's clothes were hardly more than rags, and offered little in the way of warmth. One of her sandals had slipped off during her wild flight from Meereen and she had left the other up by Drogon's cave, preferring to go barefoot rather than half-shod. Her *tokar* and veils she had abandoned in the pit, and her linen undertunic had never been made to withstand the hot days and cold nights of the Dothraki sea. Sweat and grass and dirt had stained it,

and Dany had torn a strip off the hem to make a bandage for her shin. *I must look a ragged thing, and starved*, she thought, *but if the days stay warm, I will not freeze.*

Hers had been a lonely sojourn, and for most of it she had been hurt and hungry ... yet despite it all she had been strangely happy here. *A few aches, an empty belly, chills by night ... what does it matter when you can fly? I would do it all again.*

Jhiqui and Irri would be waiting atop her pyramid back in Meereen, she told herself. Her sweet scribe Missandei as well, and all her little pages. They would bring her food, and she could bathe in the pool beneath the persimmon tree. It would be good to feel clean again. Dany did not need a glass to know that she was filthy.

She was hungry too. One morning she had found some wild onions growing halfway down the south slope, and later that same day a leafy reddish vegetable that might have been some queer sort of cabbage. Whatever it was, it had not made her sick. Aside from that, and one fish that she had caught in the spring-fed pool outside of Drogon's cave, she had survived as best she could on the dragon's leavings, on burned bones and chunks of smoking meat, half-charred and half-raw. She needed more, she knew. One day she kicked at a cracked sheep's skull with the side of a bare foot and sent it bouncing over the edge of the hill. And as she watched it tumble down the steep slope toward the sea of grass, she realized she must follow.

Dany set off through the tall grass at a brisk pace. The earth felt warm between her toes. The grass was as tall as she was. *It never seemed so high when I was mounted on my silver, riding beside my sun-and-stars at the head of his khalasar.* As she walked, she tapped her thigh with the pitmaster's whip. That, and the rags on her back, were all she had taken from Meereen.

Though she walked through a green kingdom, it was not the deep rich green of summer. Even here autumn made its presence felt, and winter would not be far behind. The grass was paler than she remembered, a wan and sickly green on the verge of going yellow. After that would come brown. The grass was dying.

Daenerys Targaryen was no stranger to the Dothraki sea, the great ocean of grass that stretched from the forest of Qohor to the Mother of Mountains and the Womb of the World. She had seen it first when she was still a girl, newly wed to Khal Drogo and on her way to Vaes Dothrak to be presented to the crones of the *dosh khaleen*. The sight of all that grass stretching out before her had taken her breath away. *The sky was blue, the grass was green, and I was full of hope.* Ser Jorah had been with her then, her gruff old bear. She'd had Irri and Jhiqui and Doreah to care for her, her sun-and-stars to hold her in the night, his child growing inside her. *Rhaego. I was going to name him Rhaego, and the dosh khaleen said he would be the Stallion Who Mounts the World.* Not since those half-remembered days in Braavos when she lived in the house with the red door had she been as happy.

But in the Red Waste, all her joy had turned to ashes. Her sun-and-stars had fallen from his horse, the *maegi* Mirri Maz Duur had murdered Rhaego in her womb, and Dany had smothered the empty shell of Khal Drogo with her own two hands. Afterward Drogo's great *khalasar* had shattered. Ko Pono named himself Khal Pono and took many riders with him, and many slaves as well. Ko Jhaqo named himself Khal Jhaqo and rode off with even more. Mago, his bloodrider, raped and murdered Eroeh, a girl Daenerys had once saved from him. Only the birth of her dragons amidst the fire and smoke of Khal Drogo's funeral pyre had spared Dany herself from being dragged back to Vaes Dothrak to live out the remainder of her days amongst the crones of the *dosh khaleen*.

The fire burned away my hair, but otherwise it did not touch me. It had been the same in Daznak's Pit. That much she could recall, though much of what followed was a haze. *So many people, screaming and shoving.* She remembered rearing horses, a food cart spilling melons as it overturned. From below a spear came flying, followed by a flight of crossbow bolts. One passed so close that Dany felt it brush her cheek. Others skittered off Drogon's scales, lodged between them, or tore through the membrane of his wings. She remembered the dragon twisting beneath her, shuddering at the impacts, as she tried desperately to cling to his scaled back. The wounds were smoking. Dany saw one of the bolts burst into sudden flame. Another fell away, shaken loose by the beating of his wings. Below, she saw men

whirling, wreathed in flame, hands up in the air as if caught in the throes of some mad dance. A woman in a green *tokar* reached for a weeping child, pulling him down into her arms to shield him from the flames. Dany saw the color vividly, but not the woman's face. People were stepping on her as they lay tangled on the bricks. Some were on fire.

Then all of that had faded, the sounds dwindling, the people shrinking, the spears and arrows falling back beneath them as Drogon clawed his way into the sky. Up and up and up he'd borne her, high above the pyramids and pits, his wings outstretched to catch the warm air rising from the city's sun baked bricks. *If I fall and die, it will still have been worth it*, she had thought.

North they flew, beyond the river, Drogon gliding on torn and tattered wings through clouds that whipped by like the banners of some ghostly army. Dany glimpsed the shores of Slaver's Bay and the old Valyrian road that ran beside it through sand and desolation until it vanished in the west. *The road home*. Then there was nothing beneath them but grass rippling in the wind.

Was that first flight a thousand years ago? Sometimes it seemed as if it must be.

The sun grew hotter as it rose, and before long her head was pounding. Dany's hair was growing out again, but slowly. "I need a hat," she said aloud. Up on Dragonstone she had tried to make one for herself, weaving stalks of grass together as she had seen Dothraki women do during her time with Drogo, but either she was using the wrong sort of grass or she simply lacked the necessary skill. Her hats all fell to pieces in her hands. *Try again*, she told herself. *You will do better the next time. You are the blood of the dragon, you can make a hat*. She tried and tried, but her last attempt had been no more successful than her first.

It was afternoon by the time Dany found the stream she had glimpsed atop the hill. It was a rill, a rivulet, a trickle, no wider than her arm ... and her arm had grown thinner every day she spent on Dragonstone. Dany scooped up a handful of water and splashed it on her face. When she cupped her hands, her knuckles squished in the mud at the bottom of the stream. She

might have wished for colder, clearer water ... but no, if she were going to pin her hopes on wishes, she would wish for rescue.

She still clung to the hope that someone would come after her. Ser Barristan might come seeking her; he was the first of her Queensguard, sworn to defend her life with his own. And her bloodriders were no strangers to the Dothraki sea, and their lives were bound to her own. Her husband, the noble Hizdahr zo Loraq, might dispatch searchers. And Daario ... Dany pictured him riding toward her through the tall grass, smiling, his golden tooth gleaming with the last light of the setting sun.

Only Daario had been given to the Yunkai'i, a hostage to ensure no harm came to the Yunkish captains. *Daario and Hero, Jhogo and Groleo, and three of Hizdahr's kin.* By now, surely, all of her hostages would have been released. But ...

She wondered if her captain's blades still hung upon the wall beside her bed, waiting for Daario to return and claim them. *"I will leave my girls with you,"* he had said. *"Keep them safe for me, beloved."* And she wondered how much the Yunkai'i knew about what her captain meant to her. She had asked Ser Barristan that question the afternoon the hostages went forth. "They will have heard the talk," he had replied. "Naharis may even have boasted of Your Grace's ... of your great ... regard ... for him. If you will forgive my saying so, modesty is not one of the captain's virtues. He takes great pride in his ... his swordsmanship."

He boasts of bedding me, you mean. But Daario would not have been so foolish as to make such a boast amongst her enemies. *It makes no matter. By now the Yunkai'i will be marching home.* That was why she had done all that she had done. For peace.

She turned back the way she'd come, to where Dragonstone rose above the grasslands like a clenched fist. *It looks so close. I've been walking for hours, yet it still looks as if I could reach out and touch it.* It was not too late to go back. There were fish in the spring-fed pool by Drogon's cave. She had caught one her first day there, she might catch more. And there would be scraps, charred bones with bits of flesh still on them, the remnants of Drogon's kills.

No, Dany told herself. *If I look back I am lost.* She might live for years amongst the sunbaked rocks of Dragonstone, riding Drogon by day and gnawing at his leavings every evenfall as the great grass sea turned from gold to orange, but that was not the life she had been born to. So once again she turned her back upon the distant hill and closed her ears to the song of flight and freedom that the wind sang as it played amongst the hill's stony ridges. The stream was trickling south by southeast, as near as she could tell. She followed it. *Take me to the river, that is all I ask of you. Take me to the river, and I will do the rest.*

The hours passed slowly. The stream bent this way and that, and Dany followed, beating time upon her leg with the whip, trying not to think about how far she had to go, or the pounding in her head, or her empty belly. *Take one step. Take the next. Another step. Another.* What else could she do?

It was quiet on her sea. When the wind blew the grass would sigh as the stalks brushed against each other, whispering in a tongue that only gods could understand. Now and again the little stream would gurgle where it flowed around a stone. Mud squished between her toes. Insects buzzed around her, lazy dragonflies and glistening green wasps and stinging midges almost too small to see. She swatted at them absently when they landed on her arms. Once she came upon a rat drinking from the stream, but it fled when she appeared, scurrying between the stalks to vanish in the high grass. Sometimes she heard birds singing. The sound made her belly rumble, but she had no nets to snare them with, and so far she had not come on any nests. *Once I dreamed of flying,* she thought, *and now I've flown, and dream of stealing eggs.* That made her laugh. "Men are mad and gods are madder," she told the grass, and the grass murmured its agreement.

Thrice that day she caught sight of Drogon. Once he was so far off that he might have been an eagle, slipping in and out of distant clouds, but Dany knew the look of him by now, even when he was no more than a speck. The second time he passed before the sun, his black wings spread, and the world darkened. The last time he flew right above her, so close she could hear the sound of his wings. For half a heartbeat Dany thought that he was hunting her, but he flew on without taking any notice of her and vanished somewhere in the east. *Just as well,* she thought.

Evening took her almost unawares. As the sun was gilding the distant spires of Dragonstone, Dany stumbled onto a low stone wall, overgrown and broken. Perhaps it had been part of a temple, or the hall of the village lord. More ruins lay beyond it—an old well, and some circles in the grass that marked the sites where hovels had once stood. They had been built of mud and straw, she judged, but long years of wind and rain had worn them away to nothing. Dany found eight before the sun went down, but there might have been more farther out, hidden in the grass.

The stone wall had endured better than the rest. Though it was nowhere more than three feet high, the angle where it met another, lower wall still offered some shelter from the elements, and night was coming on fast. Dany wedged herself into that corner, making a nest of sorts by tearing up handfuls of the grass that grew around the ruins. She was very tired, and fresh blisters had appeared on both her feet, including a matched set upon her pinky toes. *It must be from the way I walk*, she thought, giggling.

As the world darkened, Dany settled in and closed her eyes, but sleep refused to come. The night was cold, the ground hard, her belly empty. She found herself thinking of Meereen, of Daario, her love, and Hizdahr, her husband, of Irri and Jhiqui and sweet Missandei, Ser Barristan and Reznak and Skahaz Shavepate. *Do they fear me dead? I flew off on a dragon's back. Will they think he ate me?* She wondered if Hizdahr was still king. His crown had come from her, could he hold it in her absence? *He wanted Drogon dead. I heard him. "Kill it," he screamed, "kill the beast," and the look upon his face was lustful.* And Strong Belwas had been on his knees, heaving and shuddering. *Poison. It had to be poison. The honeyed locusts. Hizdahr urged them on me, but Belwas ate them all.* She had made Hizdahr her king, taken him into her bed, opened the fighting pits for him, he had no reason to want her dead. Yet who else could it have been? Reznak, her perfumed seneschal? The Yunkai'i? The Sons of the Harpy?

Off in the distance, a wolf howled. The sound made her feel sad and lonely, but no less hungry. As the moon rose above the grasslands, Dany slipped at last into a restless sleep.

She dreamed. All her cares fell away from her, and all her pains as well, and she seemed to float upward into the sky. She was flying once again,

spinning, laughing, dancing, as the stars wheeled around her and whispered secrets in her ear. “To go north, you must journey south. To reach the west, you must go east. To go forward, you must go back. To touch the light you must pass beneath the shadow.”

“Quaithe?” Dany called. “Where are you, Quaithe?”

Then she saw. *Her mask is made of starlight.* “Remember who you are, Daenerys,” the stars whispered in a woman’s voice. “The dragons know. Do you?”

The next morning she woke stiff and sore and aching, with ants crawling on her arms and legs and face. When she realized what they were, she kicked aside the stalks of dry brown grass that had served as her bed and blanket and struggled to her feet. She had bites all over her, little red bumps, itchy and inflamed. *Where did all the ants come from?* Dany brushed them from her arms and legs and belly. She ran a hand across her stubbly scalp where her hair had burned away, and felt more ants on her head, and one crawling down the back of her neck. She knocked them off and crushed them under her bare feet. There were so many ...

It turned out that their anthill was on the other side of her wall. She wondered how the ants had managed to climb over it and find her. To them these tumbledown stones must loom as huge as the Wall of Westeros. *The biggest wall in all the world*, her brother Viserys used to say, as proud as if he’d built it himself.

Viserys told her tales of knights so poor that they had to sleep beneath the ancient hedges that grew along the byways of the Seven Kingdoms. Dany would have given much and more for a nice thick hedge. *Preferably one without an anthill.*

The sun was only just coming up. A few bright stars lingered in the cobalt sky. *Perhaps one of them is Khal Drogo, sitting on his fiery stallion in the night lands and smiling down on me.* Dragonstone was still visible above the grasslands. *It looks so close. I must be leagues away by now, but it looks as if I could be back in an hour.* She wanted to lie back down, close her

eyes, and give herself up to sleep. *No. I must keep going. The stream. Just follow the stream.*

Dany took a moment to make certain of her directions. It would not do to walk the wrong way and lose her stream. “My friend,” she said aloud. “If I stay close to my friend I won’t get lost.” She would have slept beside the water if she dared, but there were animals who came down to the stream to drink at night. She had seen their tracks. Dany would make a poor meal for a wolf or lion, but even a poor meal was better than none.

Once she was certain which way was south, she counted off her paces. The stream appeared at eight. Dany cupped her hands to drink. The water made her belly cramp, but cramps were easier to bear than thirst. She had no other drink but the morning dew that glistened on the tall grass, and no food at all unless she cared to eat the grass. *I could try eating ants.* The little yellow ones were too small to provide much in the way of nourishment, but there were red ants in the grass, and those were bigger. “I am lost at sea,” she said as she limped along beside her meandering rivulet, “so perhaps I’ll find some crabs, or a nice fat fish.” Her whip slapped softly against her thigh, *wap wap wap*. One step at a time, and the stream would see her home.

Just past midday she came upon a bush growing by the stream, its twisted limbs covered with hard green berries. Dany squinted at them suspiciously, then plucked one from a branch and nibbled at it. Its flesh was tart and chewy, with a bitter aftertaste that seemed familiar to her. “In the *khalasar*, they used berries like these to flavor roasts,” she decided. Saying it aloud made her more certain of it. Her belly rumbled, and Dany found herself picking berries with both hands and tossing them into her mouth.

An hour later, her stomach began to cramp so badly that she could not go on. She spent the rest of that day retching up green slime. *If I stay here, I will die. I may be dying now.* Would the horse god of the Dothraki part the grass and claim her for his starry *khalasar*, so she might ride the night-lands with Khal Drogo? In Westeros the dead of House Targaryen were given to the flames, but who would light her pyre here? *My flesh will feed the wolves and carrion crows*, she thought sadly, *and worms will burrow through my womb*. Her eyes went back to Dragonstone. It looked smaller. She could see

smoke rising from its wind-carved summit, miles away. *Drogon has returned from hunting.*

Sunset found her squatting in the grass, groaning. Every stool was looser than the one before, and smelled fouler. By the time the moon came up she was shitting brown water. The more she drank, the more she shat, but the more she shat, the thirstier she grew, and her thirst sent her crawling to the stream to suck up more water. When she closed her eyes at last, Dany did not know whether she would be strong enough to open them again.

She dreamt of her dead brother.

Viserys looked just as he had the last time she'd seen him. His mouth was twisted in anguish, his hair was burnt, and his face was black and smoking where the molten gold had run down across his brow and cheeks and into his eyes.

"You are dead," Dany said.

Murdered. Though his lips never moved, somehow she could hear his voice, whispering in her ear. *You never mourned me, sister. It is hard to die unmourned.*

"I loved you once."

Once, he said, so bitterly it made her shudder. *You were supposed to be my wife, to bear me children with silver hair and purple eyes, to keep the blood of the dragon pure. I took care of you. I taught you who you were. I fed you. I sold our mother's crown to keep you fed.*

"You hurt me. You frightened me."

Only when you woke the dragon. I loved you. "You sold me. You betrayed me."

No. You were the betrayer. You turned against me, against your own blood. They cheated me. Your horsey husband and his stinking savages. They were cheats and liars. They promised me a golden crown and gave me this. He

touched the molten gold that was creeping down his face, and smoke rose from his finger.

“You could have had your crown,” Dany told him. “My sun-and-stars would have won it for you if only you had waited.”

I waited long enough. I waited my whole life. I was their king, their rightful king. They laughed at me.

“You should have stayed in Pentos with Magister Illyrio. Khal Drogo had to present me to the *dosh khaleen*, but you did not have to ride with us. That was your choice. Your mistake.”

Do you want to wake the dragon, you stupid little whore? Drogo’s khalasar was mine. I bought them from him, a hundred thousand screamers. I paid for them with your maidenhead.

“You never understood. Dothraki do not buy and sell. They give gifts and receive them. If you had waited ...”

I did wait. For my crown, for my throne, for you. All those years, and all I ever got was a pot of molten gold. Why did they give the dragon’s eggs to you? They should have been mine. If I’d had a dragon, I would have taught the world the meaning of our words. Viserys began to laugh, until his jaw fell away from his face, smoking, and blood and molten gold ran from his mouth.

When she woke, gasping, her thighs were slick with blood.

For a moment she did not realize what it was. The world had just begun to lighten, and the tall grass rustled softly in the wind. *No, please, let me sleep some more. I’m so tired.* She tried to burrow back beneath the pile of grass she had torn up when she went to sleep. Some of the stalks felt wet. Had it rained again? She sat up, afraid that she had soiled herself as she slept. When she brought her fingers to her face, she could smell the blood on them. *Am I dying?* Then she saw the pale crescent moon, floating high above the grass, and it came to her that this was no more than her moon blood.

If she had not been so sick and scared, that might have come as a relief. Instead she began to shiver violently. She rubbed her fingers through the dirt, and grabbed a handful of grass to wipe between her legs. *The dragon does not weep.* She was bleeding, but it was only woman's blood. *The moon is still a crescent, though. How can that be?* She tried to remember the last time she had bled. The last full moon? The one before? The one before that? *No, it cannot have been so long as that.* "I am the blood of the dragon," she told the grass, aloud.

Once, the grass whispered back, until you chained your dragons in the dark.

"Drogon killed a little girl. Her name was ... her name ..." Dany could not recall the child's name. That made her so sad that she would have cried if all her tears had not been burned away. "I will never have a little girl. I was the Mother of Dragons."

Aye, the grass said, but you turned against your children.

Her belly was empty, her feet sore and blistered, and it seemed to her that the cramping had grown worse. Her guts were full of writhing snakes biting at her bowels. She scooped up a handful of mud and water in trembling hands. By midday the water would be tepid, but in the chill of dawn it was almost cool and helped her keep her eyes open. As she splashed her face, she saw fresh blood on her thighs. The ragged hem of her under-tunic was stained with it. The sight of so much red frightened her. *Moon blood, it's only my moon blood,* but she did not remember ever having such a heavy flow. *Could it be the water?* If it was the water, she was doomed. She had to drink or die of thirst.

"Walk," Dany commanded herself. "Follow the stream and it will take you to the Skahazadhan. That's where Daario will find you." But it took all her strength just to get back to her feet, and when she did all she could do was stand there, fevered and bleeding. She raised her eyes to the empty blue sky, squinting at the sun. *Half the morning gone already,* she realized, dismayed. She made herself take a step, and then another, and then she was walking once again, following the little stream.

The day grew warmer, and the sun beat down upon her head and the burnt remnants of her hair. Water splashed against the soles of her feet. She was walking in the stream. How long had she been doing that? The soft brown mud felt good between her toes and helped to soothe her blisters. *In the stream or out of it, I must keep walking. Water flows downhill. The stream will take me to the river, and the river will take me home.*

Except it wouldn't, not truly.

Meereen was not her home, and never would be. It was a city of strange men with strange gods and stranger hair, of slavers wrapped in fringed *tokars*, where grace was earned through whoring, butchery was art, and dog was a delicacy. Meereen would always be the Harpy's city, and Daenerys could not be a harpy.

Never, said the grass, in the gruff tones of Jorah Mormont. *You were warned, Your Grace. Let this city be, I said. Your war is in Westeros, I told you.*

The voice was no more than a whisper, yet somehow Dany felt that he was walking just behind her. *My bear*, she thought, *my old sweet bear, who loved me and betrayed me*. She had missed him so. She wanted to see his ugly face, to wrap her arms around him and press herself against his chest, but she knew that if she turned around Ser Jorah would be gone. "I am dreaming," she said. "A waking dream, a walking dream. I am alone and lost."

Lost, because you lingered, in a place that you were never meant to be, murmured Ser Jorah, as softly as the wind. *Alone, because you sent me from your side.*

"You betrayed me. You informed on me, for gold."

For home. Home was all I ever wanted. "And me. You wanted me." Dany had seen it in his eyes.

I did, the grass whispered, sadly. "You kissed me. I never said you could, but you did. You sold me to my enemies, but you meant it when you kissed

me.”

I gave you good counsel. Save your spears and swords for the Seven Kingdoms, I told you. Leave Meereen to the Meereenese and go west, I said. You would not listen.

“I had to take Meereen or see my children starve along the march.” Dany could still see the trail of corpses she had left behind her crossing the Red Waste. It was not a sight she wished to see again. “I had to take Meereen to feed my people.”

You took Meereen, he told her, yet still you lingered. “To be a queen.”

You are a queen, her bear said. In Westeros. “It is such a long way,” she complained. “I was tired, Jorah. I was weary of war. I wanted to rest, to laugh, to plant trees and see them grow. I am only a young girl.”

No. You are the blood of the dragon. The whispering was growing fainter, as if Ser Jorah were falling farther behind. Dragons plant no trees. Remember that. Remember who you are, what you were made to be. Remember your words.

“Fire and Blood,” Daenerys told the swaying grass.

A stone turned under her foot. She stumbled to one knee and cried out in pain, hoping against hope that her bear would gather her up and help her to her feet. When she turned her head to look for him, all she saw was trickling brown water ... and the grass, still moving slightly. *The wind*, she told herself, *the wind shakes the stalks and makes them sway*. Only no wind was blowing. The sun was overhead, the world still and hot. Midges swarmed in the air, and a dragonfly floated over the stream, darting here and there. And the grass was moving when it had no cause to move.

She fumbled in the water, found a stone the size of her fist, pulled it from the mud. It was a poor weapon but better than an empty hand. From the corner of her eye Dany saw the grass move again, off to her right. The grass swayed and bowed low, as if before a king, but no king appeared to her. The world was green and empty. The world was green and silent. The world was

yellow, dying. *I should get up*, she told herself. *I have to walk. I have to follow the stream.*

Through the grass came a soft silvery tinkling.

Bells, Dany thought, smiling, remembering Khal Drogo, her sunand-stars, and the bells he braided into his hair. *When the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, when the seas go dry and mountains blow in the wind like leaves, when my womb quickens again and I bear a living child, Khal Drogo will return to me.*

But none of those things had happened. *Bells*, Dany thought again. Her bloodriders had found her. “Aggo,” she whispered. “Jhogo. Rakharo.” Might Daario have come with them?

The green sea opened. A rider appeared. His braid was black and shiny, his skin as dark as burnished copper, his eyes the shape of bitter almonds. *Bells* sang in his hair. He wore a medallion belt and painted vest, with an *arakh* on one hip and a whip on the other. A hunting bow and a quiver of arrows were slung from his saddle.

One rider, and alone. A scout. He was one who rode before the *khalasar* to find the game and the good green grass, and sniff out foes wherever they might hide. If he found her there, he would kill her, rape her, or enslave her. At best, he would send her back to the crones of the *dosh khaleen*, where good *khaleesi* were supposed to go when their khals had died.

He did not see her, though. The grass concealed her, and he was looking elsewhere. Dany followed his eyes, and there the shadow flew, with wings spread wide. The dragon was a mile off, and yet the scout stood frozen until his stallion began to whicker in fear. Then he woke as if from a dream, wheeled his mount about, and raced off through the tall grass at a gallop.

Dany watched him go. When the sound of his hooves had faded away to silence, she began to shout. She called until her voice was hoarse ... and Drogon came, snorting plumes of smoke. The grass bowed down before him. Dany leapt onto his back. She stank of blood and sweat and fear, but none of that mattered. “To go forward I must go back,” she said. Her bare

legs tightened around the dragon's neck. She kicked him, and Drogon threw himself into the sky. Her whip was gone, so she used her hands and feet and turned him north by east, the way the scout had gone. Drogon went willingly enough; perhaps he smelled the rider's fear.

In a dozen heartbeats they were past the Dothraki, as he galloped far below. To the right and left, Dany glimpsed places where the grass was burned and ashen. *Drogon has come this way before*, she realized. Like a chain of grey islands, the marks of his hunting dotted the green grass sea.

A vast herd of horses appeared below them. There were riders too, a score or more, but they turned and fled at the first sight of the dragon. The horses broke and ran when the shadow fell upon them, racing through the grass until their sides were white with foam, tearing the ground with their hooves ... but as swift as they were, they could not fly. Soon one horse began to lag behind the others. The dragon descended on him, roaring, and all at once the poor beast was aflame, yet somehow he kept on running, screaming with every step, until Drogon landed on him and broke his back. Dany clutched the dragon's neck with all her strength to keep from sliding off.

The carcass was too heavy for him to bear back to his lair, so Drogon consumed his kill there, tearing at the charred flesh as the grasses burned around them, the air thick with drifting smoke and the smell of burnt horsehair. Dany, starved, slid off his back and ate with him, ripping chunks of smoking meat from the dead horse with bare, burned hands. *In Meereen I was a queen in silk, nibbling on stuffed dates and honeyed lamb*, she remembered. *What would my noble husband think if he could see me now?* Hizdahr would be horrified, no doubt. But Daario ...

Daario would laugh, carve off a hunk of horsemeat with his *arakh*, and squat down to eat beside her.

As the western sky turned the color of a blood bruise, she heard the sound of approaching horses. Dany rose, wiped her hands on her ragged undertunic, and went to stand beside her dragon.

That was how Khal Jhaqo found her, when half a hundred mounted warriors emerged from the drifting smoke.