

DAENERYS

Galazza Galare arrived at the Great Pyramid attended by a dozen White Graces, girls of noble birth who were still too young to have served their year in the temple's pleasure gardens. They made for a pretty portrait, the proud old woman all in green surrounded by the little girls robed and veiled in white, armored in their innocence.

The queen welcomed them warmly, then summoned Missandei to see that the girls were fed and entertained whilst she shared a private supper with the Green Grace.

Her cooks had prepared them a magnificent meal of honeyed lamb, fragrant with crushed mint and served with the small green figs she liked so much. Two of Dany's favorite hostages served the food and kept the cups filled—a doe-eyed little girl called Qezza and a skinny boy named Grazhar. They were brother and sister, and cousins of the Green Grace, who greeted them with kisses when she swept in, and asked them if they had been good.

"They are very sweet, the both of them," Dany assured her. "Qezza sings for me sometimes. She has a lovely voice. And Ser Barristan has been instructing Grazhar and the other boys in the ways of western chivalry."

"They are of my blood," the Green Grace said, as Qezza filled her cup with a dark red wine. "It is good to know they have pleased Your Radiance. I hope I may do likewise." The old woman's hair was white and her skin was parchment thin, but the years had not dimmed her eyes. They were as green as her robes; sad eyes, full of wisdom. "If you will forgive my saying so, Your Radiance looks ... weary. Are you sleeping?"

It was all Dany could do not to laugh. "Not well. Last night three Qartheen galleys sailed up the Skahazadhan under the cover of darkness. The Mother's Men loosed flights of fire arrows at their sails and flung pots of burning pitch onto their decks, but the galleys slipped by quickly and suffered no lasting harm. The Qartheen mean to close the river to us, as they have closed the bay. And they are no longer alone. Three galleys from New

Ghis have joined them, and a carrack out of Tolos.” The Tolosi had replied to her request for an alliance by proclaiming her a whore and demanding that she return Meereen to its Great Masters. Even that was preferable to the answer of Mantarys, which came by way of caravan in a cedar chest. Inside she had found the heads of her three envoys, pickled. “Perhaps your gods can help us. Ask them to send a gale and sweep the galleys from the bay.”

“I shall pray and make sacrifice. Mayhaps the gods of Ghis will hear me.” Galazza Galare sipped her wine, but her eyes did not leave Dany. “Storms rage within the walls as well as without. More freedmen died last night, or so I have been told.”

“Three.” Saying it left a bitter taste in her mouth. “The cowards broke in on some weavers, freedwomen who had done no harm to anyone. All they did was make beautiful things. I have a tapestry they gave me hanging over my bed. The Sons of the Harpy broke their loom and raped them before slitting their throats.”

“This we have heard. And yet Your Radiance has found the courage to answer butchery with mercy. You have not harmed any of the noble children you hold as hostage.”

“Not as yet, no.” Dany had grown fond of her young charges. Some were shy and some were bold, some sweet and some sullen, but all were innocent. “If I kill my cupbearers, who will pour my wine and serve my supper?” she said, trying to make light of it.

The priestess did not smile. “The Shavepate would feed them to your dragons, it is said. A life for a life. For every Brazen Beast cut down, he would have a child die.”

Dany pushed her food about her plate. She dare not glance over to where Grazhar and Qezza stood, for fear that she might cry. *The Shavepate has a harder heart than mine.* They had fought about the hostages half a dozen times. “The Sons of the Harpy are laughing in their pyramids,” Skahaz said, just this morning. “What good are hostages if you will not take their heads?” In his eyes, she was only a weak woman. *Hazzea was enough. What good is peace if it must be purchased with the blood of little children?*

“These murders are not their doing,” Dany told the Green Grace, feebly. “I am no butcher queen.”

“And for that Meereen gives thanks,” said Galazza Galare. “We have heard that the Butcher King of Astapor is dead.”

“Slain by his own soldiers when he commanded them to march out and attack the Yunkai’i.” The words were bitter in her mouth. “He was hardly cold before another took his place, calling himself Cleon the Second. That one lasted eight days before his throat was opened. Then his killer claimed the crown. So did the first Cleon’s concubine. King Cutthroat and Queen Whore, the Astapori call them. Their followers are fighting battles in the streets, while the Yunkai’i and their sellswords wait outside the walls.”

“These are grievous times. Your Radiance, might I presume to offer you my counsel?”

“You know how much I value your wisdom.”

“Then heed me now and marry.”

“Ah.” Dany had been expecting this. “Oftimes I have heard you say that you are only a young girl. To look at you, you still seem half a child, too young and frail to face such trials by yourself. You need a king beside you to help you bear these burdens.”

Dany speared a chunk of lamb, took a bite from it, chewed slowly. “Tell me, can this king puff his cheeks up and blow Xaro’s galleys back to Qarth? Can he clap his hands and break the siege of Astapor? Can he put food in the bellies of my children and bring peace back to my streets?”

“Can you?” the Green Grace asked. “A king is not a god, but there is still much that a strong man might do. When my people look at you, they see a conqueror from across the seas, come to murder us and make slaves of our children. A king could change that. A highborn king of pure Ghiscari blood could reconcile the city to your rule. Elsewise, I fear, your reign must end as it began, in blood and fire.”

Dany pushed her food about her plate. “And who would the gods of Ghis have me take as my king and consort?”

“Hizdahr zo Loraq,” Galazza Galare said firmly.

Dany did not trouble to feign surprise. “Why Hizdahr? Skahaz is noble born as well.”

“Skahaz is Kandaq, Hizdahr Loraq. Your Radiance will forgive me, but only one who is not herself Ghiscari would not understand the difference. Oft have I heard that yours is the blood of Aegon the Conqueror, Jaehaerys the Wise, and Daeron the Dragon. The noble Hizdahr is of the blood of Mazdhan the Magnificent, Hazrak the Handsome, and Zharaq the Liberator.”

“His forebears are as dead as mine. Will Hizdahr raise their shades to defend Meereen against its enemies? I need a man with ships and swords. You offer me ancestors.”

“We are an old people. Ancestors are important to us. Wed Hizdahr zo Loraq and make a son with him, a son whose father is the harpy, whose mother is the dragon. In him the prophecies shall be fulfilled, and your enemies will melt away like snow.”

He shall be the stallion that mounts the world. Dany knew how it went with prophecies. They were made of words, and words were wind. There would be no son for Loraq, no heir to unite dragon and harpy. *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.* Only then would her womb quicken once again ...

... but Daenerys Targaryen had other children, tens of thousands who had hailed her as their mother when she broke their chains. She thought of Stalwart Shield, of Missandei’s brother, of the woman Rylona Rhee, who had played the harp so beautifully. No marriage would ever bring them back to life, but if a husband could help end the slaughter, then she owed it to her dead to marry.

If I wed Hizdahr, will that turn Skahaz against me? She trusted Skahaz more than she trusted Hizdahr, but the Shavepate would be a disaster as a king. He was too quick to anger, too slow to forgive. She saw no gain in wedding a man as hated as herself. Hizdahr was well respected, so far as she could see. “What does my prospective husband think of this?” she asked the Green Grace. *What does he think of me?*

“Your Grace need only ask him. The noble Hizdahr awaits below. Send down to him if that is your pleasure.”

You presume too much, priestess, the queen thought, but she swallowed her anger and made herself smile. “Why not?” She sent for Ser Barristan and told the old knight to bring Hizdahr to her. “It is a long climb. Have the Unsullied help him up.”

By the time the nobleman had made the ascent, the Green Grace had finished eating. “If it please Your Magnificence, I will take my leave. You and the noble Hizdahr will have many things to discuss, I do not doubt.” The old woman dabbed a smear of honey off her lips, gave Qezza and Grazhar each a parting kiss upon the brow, and fastened her silken veil across her face. “I shall return to the Temple of the Graces and pray for the gods to show my queen the course of wisdom.”

When she was gone, Dany let Qezza fill her cup again, dismissed the children, and commanded that Hizdahr zo Loraq be admitted to her presence. *And if he dares say one word about his precious fighting pits, I may have him thrown off the terrace.*

Hizdahr wore a plain green robe beneath a quilted vest. He bowed low when he entered, his face solemn. “Have you no smile for me?” Dany asked him. “Am I as fearful as all that?”

“I always grow solemn in the presence of such beauty.”

It was a good start. “Drink with me.” Dany filled his cup herself. “You know why you are here. The Green Grace seems to feel that if I take you for my husband, all my woes will vanish.”

“I would never make so bold a claim. Men are born to strive and suffer. Our woes only vanish when we die. I can be of help to you, however. I have gold and friends and influence, and the blood of Old Ghis flows in my veins. Though I have never wed, I have two natural children, a boy and a girl, so I can give you heirs. I can reconcile the city to your rule and put an end to this nightly slaughter in the streets.”

“Can you?” Dany studied his eyes. “Why should the Sons of the Harpy lay down their knives for you? Are you one of them?”

“No.”

“Would you tell me if you were?”

He laughed. “No.”

“The Shavepate has ways of finding the truth.”

“I do not doubt that Skahaz would soon have me confessing. A day with him, and I will be one of the Harpy’s Sons. Two days, and I will be the Harpy. Three, and it will turn out I slew your father too, back in the Sunset Kingdoms when I was yet a boy. Then he will impale me on a stake and you can watch me die ... but afterward the killings will go on.” Hizdahr leaned closer. “Or you can marry me and let me try to stop them.”

“Why would you *want* to help me? For the crown?”

“A crown would suit me well, I will not deny that. It is more than that, however. Is it so strange that I would want to protect my own people, as you protect your freedmen? Meereen cannot endure another war, Your Radiance.”

That was a good answer, and an honest one. “I have never wanted war. I defeated the Yunkai’i once and spared their city when I might have sacked it. I refused to join King Cleon when he marched against them. Even now, with Astapor besieged, I stay my hand. And Qarth ... I have never done the Qartheen any harm ...”

“Not by intent, no, but Qarth is a city of merchants, and they love the clink of silver coins, the gleam of yellow gold. When you smashed the slave trade, the blow was felt from Westeros to Asshai. Qarth depends upon its slaves. So too Tolos, New Ghis, Lys, Tyrosh, Volantis ... the list is long, my queen.”

“Let them come. In me they shall find a sterner foe than Cleon. I would sooner perish fighting than return my children to bondage.”

“There may be another choice. The Yunkai’i can be persuaded to allow all your freedmen to remain free, I believe, if Your Worship will agree that the Yellow City may trade and train slaves unmolested from this day forth. No more blood need flow.”

“Save for the blood of those slaves that the Yunkai’i will *trade* and *train*,” Dany said, but she recognized the truth in his words even so. *It may be that is the best end we can hope for.* “You have not said you love me.”

“I will, if it would please Your Radiance.”

“That is not the answer of a man in love.”

“What is love? Desire? No man with all his parts could ever look on you and not desire you, Daenerys. That is not why I would marry you, however. Before you came Meereen was dying. Our rulers were old men with withered cocks and crones whose puckered cunts were dry as dust. They sat atop their pyramids sipping apricot wine and talking of the glories of the Old Empire whilst the centuries slipped by and the very bricks of the city crumbled all around them. Custom and caution had an iron grip upon us till you awakened us with fire and blood. A new time has come, and new things are possible. Marry me.”

He is not hard to look at, Dany told herself, and he has a king’s tongue.

“Kiss me,” she commanded.

He took her hand again, and kissed her fingers. “Not that way. Kiss me as if I were your wife.”

Hizdahr took her by the shoulders as tenderly as if she were a baby bird. Leaning forward, he pressed his lips to hers. His kiss was light and dry and quick. Dany felt no stirrings.

“Shall I ... kiss you again?” he asked when it was over. “No.” On her terrace, in her bathing pool, the little fish would nibble at her legs as she soaked. Even they kissed with more fervor than Hizdahr zo Loraq. “I do not love you.”

Hizdahr shrugged. “That may come, in time. It has been known to happen that way.”

Not with us, she thought. *Not whilst Daario is so close. It's him I want, not you.* “One day I will want to return to Westeros, to claim the Seven Kingdoms that were my father’s.”

“One day all men must die, but it serves no good to dwell on death. I prefer to take each day as it comes.”

Dany folded her hands together. “Words are wind, even words like *love* and *peace*. I put more trust in deeds. In my Seven Kingdoms, knights go on quests to prove themselves worthy of the maiden that they love. They seek for magic swords, for chests of gold, for crowns stolen from a dragon’s hoard.”

Hizdahr arched an eyebrow. “The only dragons that I know are yours, and magic swords are even scarcer. I will gladly bring you rings and crowns and chests of gold if that is your desire.”

“Peace is my desire. You say that you can help me end the nightly slaughter in my streets. I say *do it*. Put an end to this shadow war, my lord. That is your quest. Give me ninety days and ninety nights without a murder, and I will know that you are worthy of a throne. Can you do that?”

Hizdahr looked thoughtful. “Ninety days and ninety nights without a corpse, and on the ninety-first we wed?”

“Perhaps,” said Dany, with a coy look. “Though young girls have been known to be fickle. I may still want a magic sword.”

Hizdahr laughed. “Then you shall have that too, Radiance. Your wish is my command. Best tell your seneschal to begin making preparations for our wedding.”

“Nothing would please the noble Reznak more.” If Meereen knew that a wedding was in the offing, that alone might buy her a few nights’ respite, even if Hizdahr’s efforts came to naught. *The Shavepate will not be happy with me, but Reznak mo Reznak will dance for joy.* Dany did not know which of those concerned her more. She needed Skahaz and the Brazen Beasts, and she had come to mistrust all of Reznak’s counsel. *Beware the perfumed seneschal. Has Reznak made common cause with Hizdahr and the Green Grace and set some trap to snare me?*

No sooner had Hizdahr zo Loraq taken his leave of her than Ser Barristan appeared behind her in his long white cloak. Years of service in the Kingsguard had taught the white knight how to remain unobtrusive when she was entertaining, but he was never far. *He knows*, she saw at once, *and he disapproves*. The lines around his mouth had deepened. “So,” she said to him, “it seems that I may wed again. Are you happy for me, ser?”

“If that is your command, Your Grace.”

“Hizdahr is not the husband you would have chosen for me.”

“It is not my place to choose your husband.”

“It is not,” she agreed, “but it is important to me that you should understand. My people are bleeding. Dying. A queen belongs not to herself, but to the realm. Marriage or carnage, those are my choices. A wedding or a war.”

“Your Grace, may I speak frankly?”

“Always.”

“There is a third choice.”

“Westeros?”

He nodded. “I am sworn to serve Your Grace, and to keep you safe from harm wherever you may go. My place is by your side, whether here or in King’s Landing ... but your place is back in Westeros, upon the Iron Throne that was your father’s. The Seven Kingdoms will never accept Hizdahr zo Loraq as king.”

“No more than Meereen will accept Daenerys Targaryen as queen. The Green Grace has the right of that. I need a king beside me, a king of old Ghiscari blood. Elsewise they will always see me as the uncouth barbarian who smashed through their gates, impaled their kin on spikes, and stole their wealth.”

“In Westeros you will be the lost child who returns to gladden her father’s heart. Your people will cheer when you ride by, and all good men will love you.”

“Westeros is far away.”

“Lingering here will never bring it any closer. The sooner we take our leave of this place—”

“I know. I *do*.” Dany did not know how to make him see. She wanted Westeros as much as he did, but first she must heal Meereen. “Ninety days is a long time. Hizdahr may fail. And if he does, the trying buys me time. Time to make alliances, to strengthen my defenses, to—”

“And if he does not fail? What will Your Grace do then?”

“Her duty.” The word felt cold upon her tongue. “You saw my brother Rhaegar wed. Tell me, did he wed for love or duty?”

The old knight hesitated. “Princess Elia was a good woman, Your Grace. She was kind and clever, with a gentle heart and a sweet wit. I know the prince was very fond of her.”

Fond, thought Dany. The word spoke volumes. *I could become fond of Hizdahr zo Loraq, in time. Perhaps.*

Ser Barristan went on. “I saw your father and your mother wed as well. Forgive me, but there was no fondness there, and the realm paid dearly for that, my queen.”

“Why did they wed if they did not love each other?”

“Your grandsire commanded it. A woods witch had told him that the prince was promised would be born of their line.”

“A woods witch?” Dany was astonished. “She came to court with Jenny of Oldstones. A stunted thing, grotesque to look upon. A dwarf, most people said, though dear to Lady Jenny, who always claimed that she was one of the children of the forest.”

“What became of her?”

“Summerhall.” The word was fraught with doom.

Dany sighed. “Leave me now. I am very weary.”

“As you command.” Ser Barristan bowed and turned to go. But at the door, he stopped. “Forgive me. Your Grace has a visitor. Shall I tell him to return upon the morrow?”

“Who is it?”

“Naharis. The Stormcrows have returned to the city.”

Daario. Her heart gave a flutter in her chest. “How long has ... when did he ... ?” She could not seem to get the words out.

Ser Barristan seemed to understand. “Your Grace was with the priestess when he arrived. I knew you would not want to be disturbed. The captain’s news can wait until the morrow.”

“No.” *How could I ever hope to sleep, knowing that my captain so close?*
“Send him up at once. And ... I will have no more need of you this evening. I shall be safe with Daario. Oh, and send Irri and Jhiqui, if you would be so good. And Missandei.” *I need to change, to make myself beautiful.*

She said as much to her handmaids when they came. “What does Your Grace wish to wear?” asked Missandei.

Starlight and seafoam, Dany thought, a wisp of silk that leaves my left breast bare for Daario’s delight. Oh, and flowers for my hair. When first they met, the captain brought her flowers every day, all the way from Yunkai to Meereen. “Bring the grey linen gown with the pearls on the bodice. Oh, and my white lion’s pelt.” She always felt safer wrapped in Drogo’s lionskin.

Daenerys received the captain on her terrace, seated on a carved stone bench beneath a pear tree. A half-moon floated in the sky above the city, attended by a thousand stars. Daario Naharis entered swaggering. *He swaggers even when he is standing still.* The captain wore striped pantaloons tucked into high boots of purple leather, a white silk shirt, a vest of golden rings. His trident beard was purple, his flamboyant mustachios gold, his long curls equal parts of both. On one hip he wore a stiletto, on the other a Dothraki *arakh*. “Bright queen,” he said, “you have grown more beautiful in my absence. How is this thing possible?”

The queen was accustomed to such praise, yet somehow the compliment meant more coming from Daario than from the likes of Reznak, Xaro, or Hizdahr. “Captain. They tell us you did us good service in Lhazar.” *I have missed you so much.*

“Your captain lives to serve his cruel queen.”

“Cruel?”

Moonlight glimmered in his eyes. “He raced ahead of all his men to see her face the sooner, only to be left languishing whilst she ate lamb and figs with some dried-up old woman.”

They never told me you were here, Dany thought, or I might have played the fool and sent for you at once. “I was supping with the Green Grace.” It seemed best not to mention Hizdahr. “I had urgent need of her wise counsel.”

“I have only one urgent need: Daenerys.”

“Shall I send for food? You must be hungry.”

“I have not eaten in two days, but now that I am here, it is enough for me to feast upon your beauty.”

“My beauty will not fill up your belly.” She plucked down a pear and tossed it at him. “Eat this.”

“If my queen commands it.” He took a bite of the pear, his gold tooth gleaming. Juice ran down into his purple beard.

The girl in her wanted to kiss him so much it hurt. *His kisses would be hard and cruel*, she told herself, *and he would not care if I cried out or commanded him to stop.* But the queen in her knew that would be folly. “Tell me of your journey.”

He gave a careless shrug. “The Yunkai’i sent some hired swords to close the Khyzai Pass. The Long Lances, they name themselves. We descended on them in the night and sent a few to hell. In Lhazar I slew two of my own serjeants for plotting to steal the gems and gold plate my queen had entrusted to me as gifts for the Lamb Men. Elsewise, all went as I had promised.”

“How many men did you lose in the fighting?”

“Nine,” said Daario, “but a dozen of the Long Lances decided they would sooner be Stormcrows than corpses, so we came out three ahead. I told them they would live longer fighting with your dragons than against them, and they saw the wisdom in my words.”

That made her wary. “They might be spying for Yunkai.”

“They are too stupid to be spies. You do not know them.”

“Neither do you. Do you trust them?”

“I trust all my men. Just as far as I can spit.” He spat out a seed and smiled at her suspicions. “Shall I bring their heads to you? I will, if you command it. One is bald and two have braids and one dyes his beard four different colors. What spy would wear such a beard, I ask you? The slinger can put a stone through a gnat’s eye at forty paces, and the ugly one has a way with horses, but if my queen says that they must die ...”

“I did not say that. I only ... see that you keep your eye on them, that’s all.” She felt foolish saying it. She always felt a little foolish when she was with Daario. *Gawky and girlish and slow-witted. What must he think of me?* She changed the subject. “Will the Lamb Men send us food?”

“Grain will come down the Skahazadhan by barge, my queen, and other goods by caravan over the Khyzai.”

“Not the Skahazadhan. The river has been closed to us. The seas as well. You will have seen the ships out in the bay. The Qartheen have driven off a third of our fishing fleet and seized another third. The others are too frightened to leave port. What little trade we still had has been cut off.”

Daario tossed away the pear stem. “Qartheen have milk in their veins. Let them see your dragons, and they’ll run.”

Dany did not want to talk about the dragons. Farmers still came to her court with burned bones, complaining of missing sheep, though Drogon had not returned to the city. Some reported seeing him north of the river, above the grass of the Dothraki sea. Down in the pit, Viserion had snapped one of his chains; he and Rhaegal grew more savage every day. Once the iron doors had glowed red-hot, her Unsullied told her, and no one dared to touch them for a day. “Astapor is under siege as well.”

“This I knew. One of the Long Lances lived long enough to tell us that men were eating one another in the Red City. He said Meereen’s turn would

come soon, so I cut his tongue out and fed it to a yellow dog. No dog will eat a liar's tongue. When the yellow dog ate his, I knew he spoke the truth."

"I have war inside the city too." She told him of the Harpy's Sons and the Brazen Beasts, of blood upon the bricks. "My enemies are all around me, within the city and without."

"Attack," he said at once. "A man surrounded by foes cannot defend himself. Try, and the axe will take you in the back whilst you are parrying the sword. No. When faced with many enemies, choose the weakest, kill him, ride over him, and escape."

"Where should I escape to?"

"Into my bed. Into my arms. Into my heart." The hilts of Daario's *arakh* and stiletto were wrought in the shape of golden women, naked and wanton. He brushed his thumbs across them in a way that was remarkably obscene and smiled a wicked smile.

Dany felt blood rushing to her face. It was almost as if he were caressing her. *Would he think me wanton too if I pulled him into bed?* He made her want to be his wanton. *I should never see him alone. He is too dangerous to have near me.* "The Green Grace says that I must take a Ghiscari king," she said, flustered. "She urges me to wed the noble Hizdahr zo Loraq."

"That one?" Daario chuckled. "Why not Grey Worm, if you want a eunuch in your bed? Do you *want* a king?"

I want you. "I want peace. I gave Hizdahr ninety days to end the killings. If he does, I will take him for a husband."

"Take me for your husband. I will do it in nine."

You know I cannot do that, she almost said. "You are fighting shadows when you should be fighting the men who cast them," Daario went on. "Kill them all and take their treasures, I say. Whisper the command, and your Daario will make you a pile of their heads taller than this pyramid."

“If I knew who they were—”

“Zhak and Pahl and Merreq. Them, and all the rest. The Great Masters. Who else would it be?”

He is as bold as he is bloody. “We have no proof this is their work. Would you have me slaughter my own subjects?”

“Your own subjects would gladly slaughter you.”

He had been so long away, Dany had almost forgotten what he was. Sellswords were treacherous by nature, she reminded herself. *Fickle, faithless, brutal. He will never be more than he is. He will never be the stuff of kings.* “The pyramids are strong,” she explained to him. “We could take them only at great cost. The moment we attack one the others will rise against us.”

“Then winkle them out of their pyramids on some pretext. A wedding might serve. Why not? Promise your hand to Hizdahr and all the Great Masters will come to see you married. When they gather in the Temple of the Graces, turn us loose upon them.”

Dany was appalled. *He is a monster. A gallant monster, but a monster still.* “Do you take me for the Butcher King?”

“Better the butcher than the meat. All kings are butchers. Are queens so different?”

“This queen is.”

Daario shrugged. “Most queens have no purpose but to warm some king’s bed and pop out sons for him. If that’s the sort of queen you mean to be, best marry Hizdahr.”

Her anger flashed. “Have you forgotten who I am?”

“No. Have you?”

Viserys would have his head off for that insolence. “I am the blood of the dragon. Do not presume to teach me lessons.” When Dany stood, the lion pelt slipped from her shoulders and tumbled to the ground. “Leave me.”

Daario gave her a sweeping bow. “I live to obey.”

When he was gone, Daenerys called Ser Barristan back. “I want the Stormcrows back in the field.”

“Your Grace? They have only now returned ...”

“I want them *gone*. Let them scout the Yunkish hinterlands and give protection to any caravans coming over the Khyzai Pass. Henceforth Daario shall make his reports to you. Give him every honor that is due him and see that his men are well paid, but on no account admit him to my presence.”

“As you say, Your Grace.”

That night she could not sleep but turned and twisted restlessly in her bed. She even went so far as to summon Irri, hoping her caresses might help ease her way to rest, but after a short while she pushed the Dothraki girl away. Irri was sweet and soft and willing, but she was not Daario.

What have I done? she thought, huddled in her empty bed. *I have waited so long for him to come back, and I send him away.* “He would make a monster of me,” she whispered, “a butcher queen.” But then she thought of Drogon far away, and the dragons in the pit. *There is blood on my hands too, and on my heart. We are not so different, Daario and I. We are both monsters.*