

## DAENERYS

On the walls of Qarth, men beat gongs to herald her coming, while others blew curious horns that encircled their bodies like great bronze snakes. A column of camelry emerged from the city as her honor guards. The riders wore scaled copper armor and snouted helms with copper tusks and long black silk plumes, and sat high on saddles inlaid with rubies and garnets. Their camels were dressed in blankets of a hundred different hues.

“Qarth is the greatest city that ever was or ever will be,” Pyat Pree had told her, back amongst the bones of Vaes Tolorro. “It is the center of the world, the gate between north and south, the bridge between east and west, ancient beyond memory of man and so magnificent that Saathos the Wise put out his eyes after gazing upon Qarth for the first time, because he knew that all he saw thereafter should look squalid and ugly by comparison.”

Dany took the warlock’s words well salted, but the magnificence of the great city was not to be denied. Three thick walls encircled Qarth, elaborately carved. The outer was red sandstone, thirty feet high and decorated with animals: snakes slithering, kites flying, fish swimming, intermingled with wolves of the red waste and striped zorses and monstrous elephants. The middle wall, forty feet high, was grey granite alive with scenes of war: the clash of sword and shield and spear, arrows in flight, heroes at battle and babes being butchered, pyres of the dead. The innermost wall was fifty feet of black marble, with carvings that made Dany blush until she told herself that she was being a fool. She was no maid; if she could look on the grey wall’s scenes of slaughter, why should she avert her eyes from the sight of men and women giving pleasure to one another?

The outer gates were banded with copper, the middle with iron; the innermost were studded with golden eyes. All opened at Dany’s approach. As she rode her silver into the city, small children rushed out to scatter flowers in her path. They wore golden sandals and bright paint, no more.

All the colors that had been missing from Vaes Tolorro had found their way to Qarth; buildings crowded about her fantastical as a fever dream in

shades of rose, violet, and umber. She passed under a bronze arch fashioned in the likeness of two snakes mating, their scales delicate flakes of jade, obsidian, and lapis lazuli. Slim towers stood taller than any Dany had ever seen, and elaborate fountains filled every square, wrought in the shapes of griffins and dragons and manticores.

The Qartheen lined the streets and watched from delicate balconies that looked too frail to support their weight. They were tall pale folk in linen and samite and tiger fur, every one a lord or lady to her eyes. The women wore gowns that left one breast bare, while the men favored beaded silk skirts. Dany felt shabby and barbaric as she rode past them in her lionskin robe with black Drogon on one shoulder. Her Dothraki called the Qartheen “Milk Men” for their paleness, and Khal Drogo had dreamed of the day when he might sack the great cities of the east. She glanced at her bloodriders, their dark almond-shaped eyes giving no hint of their thoughts. *Is it only the plunder they see?* she wondered. *How savage we must seem to these Qartheen.*

Pyrat Pree conducted her little *khalasar* down the center of a great arcade where the city’s ancient heroes stood thrice life-size on columns of white and green marble. They passed through a bazaar in a cavernous building whose latticework ceiling was home to a thousand gaily colored birds. Trees and flowers bloomed on the terraced walls above the stalls, while below it seemed as if everything the gods had put into the world was for sale.

Her silver shied as the merchant prince Xaro Xhoan Daxos rode up to her; the horses could not abide the close presence of camels, she had found. “If you see here anything that you would desire, O most beautiful of women, you have only to speak and it is yours,” Xaro called down from his ornate horned saddle.

“Qarth itself is hers, she has no need of baubles,” blue-lipped Pyat Pree sang out from her other side. “It shall be as I promised, *Khaleesi*. Come with me to the House of the Undying, and you shall drink of truth and wisdom.”

“Why should she need your Palace of Dust, when I can give her sunlight and sweet water and silks to sleep in?” Xaro said to the warlock. “The Thirteen shall set a crown of black jade and fire opals upon her lovely head.”

“The only palace I desire is the red castle at King’s Landing, my lord Pyat.” Dany was wary of the warlock; the *maegi* Mirri Maz Duur had soured her on those who played at sorcery. “And if the great of Qarth would give me gifts, Xaro, let them give me ships and swords to win back what is rightfully mine.”

Pyat’s blue lips curled upward in a gracious smile. “it shall be as you command, *Khaleesi*.” He moved away, swaying with his camel’s motion, his long beaded robes trailing behind.

“The young queen is wise beyond her years,” Xaro Xhoan Daxos murmured down at her from his high saddle. “There is a saying in Qarth. A warlock’s house is built of bones and lies.”

“Then why do men lower their voices when they speak of the warlocks of Qarth? All across the east, their power and wisdom are revered.”

“Once they were mighty,” Xaro agreed, “but now they are as ludicrous as those feeble old soldiers who boast of their prowess long after strength and skill have left them. They read their crumbling scrolls, drink shade-of-the-evening until their lips turn blue, and hint of dread powers, but they are hollow husks compared to those who went before. Pyat Pree’s gifts will turn to dust in your hands, I warn you.” He gave his camel a lick of his whip and sped away.

“The crow calls the raven black,” muttered Ser Jorah in the Common Tongue of Westeros. The exile knight rode at her right hand, as ever. For their entrance into Qarth, he had put away his Dothraki garb and donned again the plate and mail and wool of the Seven Kingdoms half a world away. “You would do well to avoid both those men, Your Grace.”

“Those men will help me to my crown,” she said. “Xaro has vast wealth, and Pyat Pree—”

“—pretends to power,” the knight said brusquely. On his dark green surcoat, the bear of House Mormont stood on its hind legs, black and fierce. Jorah looked no less ferocious as he scowled at the crowd that filled the bazaar. “I would not linger here long, my queen. I mislike the very smell of this place.”

Dany smiled. “Perhaps it’s the camels you’re smelling. The Qartheen themselves seem sweet enough to my nose.”

“Sweet smells are sometimes used to cover foul ones.”

*My great bear, Dany thought. I am his queen, but I will always be his cub as well, and he will always guard me.* It made her feel safe, but sad as well. She wished she could love him better than she did.

Xaro Xhoan Daxos had offered Dany the hospitality of his home while she was in the city. She had expected something grand. She had not expected a palace larger than many a market town. *It makes Magister Illyrio’s manse in Pentos look like a swineherd’s hovel,* she thought. Xaro swore that his home could comfortably house all of her people and their horses besides; indeed, it swallowed them. An entire wing was given over to her. She would have her own gardens, a marble bathing pool, a scrying tower and warlock’s maze. Slaves would tend her every need. In her private chambers, the floors were green marble, the walls draped with colorful silk hangings that shimmered with every breath of air. “You are too generous,” she told Xaro Xhoan Daxos.

“For the Mother of Dragons, no gift is too great.” Xaro was a languid, elegant man with a bald head and a great beak of a nose crusted with rubies, opals, and flakes of jade. “On the morrow, you shall feast upon peacock and lark’s tongue, and hear music worthy of the most beautiful of women. The Thirteen will come to do you homage, and all the great of Qarth.”

*All the great of Qarth will come to see my dragons,* Dany thought, yet she thanked Xaro for his kindness before she sent him on his way. Pyat Pree took his leave as well, vowing to petition the Undying Ones for an audience. “A honor rare as summer snows.” Before he left he kissed her bare feet with his pale blue lips and pressed on her a gift, a jar of ointment that he swore would let her see the spirits of the air. Last of the three

seekers to depart was Quaithe the shadowbinder. From her Dany received only a warning. “Beware,” the woman in the red lacquer mask said.

“Of whom?”

“Of all. They shall come day and night to see the wonder that has been born again into the world, and when they see they shall lust. For dragons are fire made flesh, and fire is power.”

When Quaithe too was gone, Ser Jorah said, “She speaks truly, my queen... though I like her no more than the others.”

“I do not understand her.” Pyat and Xaro had showered Dany with promises from the moment they first glimpsed her dragons, declaring themselves her loyal servants in all things, but from Quaithe she had gotten only the rare cryptic word. And it disturbed her that she had never seen the woman’s face. *Remember Mirri Maz Duur*, she told herself. *Remember treachery*. She turned to her bloodriders. “We will keep our own watch so long as we are here. See that no one enters this wing of the palace without my leave, and take care that the dragons are always well guarded.”

“It shall be done, *Khaleesi*,” Aggo said.

“We have seen only the parts of Qarth that Pyat Pree wished us to see,” she went on. “Rakharo, go forth and look on the rest, and tell me what you find. Take good men with you—and women, to go places where men are forbidden.”

“As you say, I do, blood of my blood,” said Rakharo.

“Ser Jorah, find the docks and see what manner of ships lay at anchor. It has been half a year since I last heard tidings from the Seven Kingdoms. Perhaps the gods will have blown some good captain here from Westeros with a ship to carry us home.”

The knight frowned. “That would be no kindness. The Usurper will kill you, sure as sunrise.” Mormont hooked his thumbs through his swordbelt. “My place is here at your side.”

“Jhogo can guard me as well. You have more languages than my bloodriders, and the Dothraki mistrust the sea and those who sail her. Only you can serve me in this. Go among the ships and speak to the crews, learn

where they are from and where they are bound and what manner of men command them.”

Reluctantly, the exile nodded. “As you say, my queen.”

When all the men had gone, her handmaids stripped off the travel-stained silks she wore, and Dany padded out to where the marble pool sat in the shade of a portico. The water was deliciously cool, and the pool was stocked with tiny golden fish that nibbled curiously at her skin and made her giggle. It felt good to close her eyes and float, knowing she could rest as long as she liked. She wondered whether Aegon’s Red Keep had a pool like this, and fragrant gardens full of lavender and mint. *It must, surely. Viserys always said the Seven Kingdoms were more beautiful than any other place in the world.*

The thought of home disquieted her. If her sun-and-stars had lived, he would have led his *khalasar* across the poison water and swept away her enemies, but his strength had left the world. Her bloodriders remained, sworn to her for life and skilled in slaughter, but only in the ways of the horselords. The Dothraki sacked cities and plundered kingdoms, they did not rule them. Dany had no wish to reduce King’s Landing to a blackened ruin full of unquiet ghosts. She had supped enough on tears. *I want to make my kingdom beautiful, to fill it with fat men and pretty maids and laughing children. I want my people to smile when they see me ride by, the way Viserys said they smiled for my father.*

But before she could do that she must conquer.

*The Usurper will kill you, sure as sunrise,* Mormont had said. Robert had slain her gallant brother Rhaegar, and one of his creatures had crossed the Dothraki sea to poison her and her unborn son. They said Robert Baratheon was strong as a bull and fearless in battle, a man who loved nothing better than war. And with him stood the great lords her brother had named the Usurper’s dogs, cold-eyed Eddard Stark with his frozen heart, and the golden Lannisters, father and son, so rich, so powerful, so treacherous.

How could she hope to overthrow such men? When Khal Drogo had lived, men trembled and made him gifts to stay his wrath. If they did not, he

took their cities, wealth and wives and all. But his *khalasar* had been vast, while hers was meager. Her people had followed her across the red waste as she chased her comet, and would follow her across the poison water too, but they would not be enough. Even her dragons might not be enough. Viserys had believed that the realm would rise for its rightful king... but Viserys had been a fool, and fools believe in foolish things.

Her doubts made her shiver. Suddenly the water felt cold to her, and the little fish prickling at her skin annoying. Dany stood and climbed from the pool. “Irri,” she called, “Jhiqui.”

As the handmaids towed her dry and wrapped her in a sandsilk robe, Dany’s thoughts went to the three who had sought her out in the City of Bones. *The Bleeding Star led me to Qarth for a purpose. Here I will find what I need, if I have the strength to take what is offered, and the wisdom to avoid the traps and snares. If the gods mean for me to conquer, they will provide, they will send me a sign, and if not... if not...*

It was near evenfall and Dany was feeding her dragons when Irri stepped through the silken curtains to tell her that Ser Jorah had returned from the docks... and not alone. “Send him in, with whomever he has brought,” she said, curious.

When they entered, she was seated on a mound of cushions, her dragons all about her. The man he brought with him wore a cloak of green and yellow feathers and had skin as black as polished jet. “Your Grace,” the knight said, “I bring you Quhuru Mo, captain of the *Cinnamon Wind* out of Tall Trees Town.”

The black man knelt. “I am greatly honored, my queen,” he said; not in the tongue of the Summer Isles, which Dany did not know, but in the liquid Valyrian of the Nine Free Cities.

“The honor is mine, Quhuru Mo,” said Dany in the same language. “Have you come from the Summer Isles?”

“This is so, Your Grace, but before, not half a year past, we called at Oldtown. From there I bring you a wondrous gift.”

“A gift?”

“A gift of news. Dragonmother, Stormborn, I tell you true, Robert Baratheon is dead.”

Outside her walls, dusk was settling over Qarth, but a sun had risen in Dany’s heart. “Dead?” she repeated. In her lap, black Drogon *hissed*, and pale smoke rose before her face like a veil. “You are certain? The Usurper is dead?”

“So it is said in Oldtown, and Dorne, and Lys, and all the other ports where we have called.”

*He sent me poisoned wine, yet I live and he is gone.* “What was the manner of his death?” On her shoulder, pale Viserion flapped wings the color of cream, stirring the air.

“Torn by a monstrous boar whilst hunting in his kingswood, or so I heard in Oldtown. Others say his queen betrayed him, or his brother, or Lord Stark who was his Hand. Yet all the tales agree in this: King Robert is dead and in his grave.”

Dany had never looked upon the Usurper’s face, yet seldom a day had passed when she had not thought of him. His great shadow had lain across her since the hour of her birth, when she came forth amidst blood and storm into a world where she no longer had a place. And now this ebony stranger had lifted that shadow.

“The boy sits the Iron Throne now,” Ser Jorah said.

“King Joffrey reigns,” Quhuru Mo agreed, “but the Lannisters rule. Robert’s brothers have fled King’s Landing. The talk is, they mean to claim the crown. And the Hand has fallen, Lord Stark who was King Robert’s friend. He has been seized for treason.”

“Ned Stark a traitor?” Ser Jorah snorted. “Not bloody likely. The Long Summer will come again before that one would besmirch his precious honor.”

“What honor could he have?” Dany said. “He was a traitor to his true king, as were these Lannisters.” It pleased her to hear that the Usurper’s dogs were fighting amongst themselves, though she was unsurprised. The same thing happened when her Drogo died, and his great *khalasar* tore



itself to pieces. “My brother is dead as well, Viserys who was the true king,” she told the Summer Islander. “Khal Drogo my lord husband killed him with a crown of molten gold.” Would her brother have been any wiser, had he known that the vengeance he had prayed for was so close at hand?

“Then I grieve for you, Dragonmother, and for bleeding Westeros, bereft of its rightful king.”

Beneath Dany’s gentle fingers, green Rhaegal stared at the stranger with eyes of molten gold. When his mouth opened, his teeth gleamed like black needles. “When does your ship return to Westeros, Captain?”

“Not for a year or more, I fear. From here the *Cinnamon Wind* sails east, to make the trader’s circle round the Jade Sea.”

“I see,” said Dany, disappointed. “I wish you fair winds and good trading, then. You have brought me a precious gift.”

“I have been amply repaid, great queen.”

She puzzled at that. “How so?”

His eyes gleamed. “I have seen dragons.”

Dany laughed. “And will see more of them one day, I hope. Come to me in King’s Landing when I am on my father’s throne, and you shall have a great reward.”

The Summer Islander promised he would do so, and kissed her lightly on the fingers as he took his leave. Jhiqui showed him out, while Ser Jorah Mormont remained.

“*Khaleesi*,” the knight said when they were alone, “I should not speak so freely of your plans, if I were you. This man will spread the tale wherever he goes now.”

“Let him,” she said. “Let the whole world know my purpose. The Usurper is dead, what does it matter?”

“Not every sailor’s tale is true,” Ser Jorah cautioned, “and even if Robert be truly dead, his son rules in his place. This changes nothing, truly.”

“This changes *everything*.” Dany rose abruptly. Screeching, her dragons uncoiled and spread their wings. Drogon flapped and clawed up to the lintel over the archway. The others skittered across the floor, wingtips scrabbling on the marble. “Before, the Seven Kingdoms were like my Drogo’s *khalasar*, a hundred thousand made as one by his strength. Now they fly to pieces, even as the *khalasar* did after my *khal* lay dead.”

“The high lords have always fought. Tell me who’s won and I’ll tell you what it means. *Khaleesi*, the Seven Kingdoms are not going to fall into your hands like so many ripe peaches. You will need a fleet, gold, armies, alliances—”

“All this I know.” She took his hands in hers and looked up into his dark suspicious eyes. *Sometimes he thinks of me as a child he must protect, and sometimes as a woman he would like to bed, but does he ever truly see me as his queen?* “I am not the frightened girl you met in Pentos. I have counted only fifteen name days, true... but I am as old as the crones in the *dosh khaleen* and as young as my dragons, Jorah. I have borne a child, burned a *khal*, and crossed the red waste and the Dothraki sea. Mine is the blood of the dragon.”

“As was your brother’s,” he said stubbornly.

“I am not Viserys.”

“No,” he admitted. “There is more of Rhaegar in you, I think, but even Rhaegar could be slain. Robert proved that on the Trident, with no more than a warhammer. Even dragons can die.”

“Dragons die.” She stood on her toes to kiss him lightly on an unshaven cheek. “But so do dragonslayers.”