

## DAENERYS

“What is it?” she cried, as Irri shook her gently by the shoulder. It was the black of night outside. *Something is wrong*, she knew at once. “Is it Daario? What’s happened?” In her dream they had been man and wife, simple folk who lived a simple life in a tall stone house with a red door. In her dream he had been kissing her all over—her mouth, her neck, her breasts.

“No, *Khaleesi*,” Irri murmured, “it is your eunuch Grey Worm and the bald men. Will you see them?”

“Yes.” Her hair was disheveled and her bedclothes all atangle, Dany realized. “Help me dress. I’ll have a cup of wine as well. To clear my head.” *To drown my dream*. She could hear the soft sounds of sobs. “Who is that weeping?”

“Your slave Missandei.” Jhiqui had a taper in her hand. “My servant. I have no slaves.” Dany did not understand. “Why does she weep?”

“For him who was her brother,” Irri told her.

The rest she had from Skahaz, Reznak, and Grey Worm, when they were ushered into her presence. Dany knew their tidings were bad before a word was spoken. One glance at the Shavepate’s ugly face sufficed to tell her that. “The Sons of the Harpy?”

Skahaz nodded. His mouth was grim.

“How many dead?”

Reznak wrung his hands. “N-nine, Magnificence. Foul work it was, and wicked. A dreadful night, dreadful.”

*Nine*. The word was a dagger in her heart. Every night the shadow war was waged anew beneath the stepped pyramids of Meereen. Every morn the sun rose upon fresh corpses, with harpies drawn in blood on the bricks beside them. Any freedman who became too prosperous or too outspoken was

marked for death. *Nine in one night, though ...* That frightened her. “Tell me.”

Grey Worm answered. “Your servants were set upon as they walked the bricks of Meereen to keep Your Grace’s peace. All were well armed, with spears and shields and short swords. Two by two they walked, and two by two they died. Your servants Black Fist and Cetherys were slain by cross-bow bolts in Mazdhan’s Maze. Your servants Mossador and Duran were crushed by falling stones beneath the river wall. Your servants Eladon Goldenhair and Loyal Spear were poisoned at a wineshop where they were accustomed to stop each night upon their rounds.”

*Mossador:* Dany made a fist. Missandei and her brothers had been taken from their home on Naath by raiders from the Basilisk Isles and sold into slavery in Astapor. Young as she was, Missandei had shown such a gift for tongues that the Good Masters had made a scribe of her. Mossador and Marselen had not been so fortunate. They had been gelded and made into Unsullied. “Have any of the murderers been captured?”

“Your servants have arrested the owner of the wineshop and his daughters. They plead their ignorance and beg for mercy.”

*They all plead ignorance and beg for mercy.* “Give them to the Shavepate. Skahaz, keep each apart from the others and put them to the question.”

“It will be done, Your Worship. Would you have me question them sweetly, or sharply?”

“Sweetly, to begin. Hear what tales they tell and what names they give you. It may be they had no part in this.” She hesitated. “Nine, the noble Reznak said. Who else?”

“Three freedmen, murdered in their homes,” the Shavepate said. “A moneylender, a cobbler, and the harpist Rylona Rhee. They cut her fingers off before they killed her.”

The queen flinched. Rylona Rhee had played the harp as sweetly as the Maiden. When she had been a slave in Yunkai, she had played for every

highborn family in the city. In Meereen she had become a leader amongst the Yunkish freedmen, their voice in Dany's councils. "We have no captives but this wineseller?"

"None, this one grieves to confess. We beg your pardon."

*Mercy*, thought Dany. *They will have the dragon's mercy.* "Skahaz, I have changed my mind. Question the man sharply."

"I could. Or I could question the daughters sharply whilst the father looks on. That will wring some names from him."

"Do as you think best, but bring me names." Her fury was a fire in her belly. "I will have no more Unsullied slaughtered. Grey Worm, pull your men back to their barracks. Henceforth let them guard my walls and gates and person. From this day, it shall be for Meereenese to keep the peace in Meereen. Skahaz, make me a new watch, made up in equal parts of shavepates and freedmen."

"As you command. How many men?"

"As many as you require."

Reznak mo Reznak gasped. "Magnificence, where is the coin to come from to pay wages for so many men?"

"From the pyramids. Call it a blood tax. I will have a hundred pieces of gold from every pyramid for each freedman that the Harpy's Sons have slain."

That brought a smile to the Shavepate's face. "It will be done," he said, "but Your Radiance should know that the Great Masters of Zhak and Merreq are making preparations to quit their pyramids and leave the city."

Daenerys was sick unto death of Zhak and Merreq; she was sick of all the Mereenese, great and small alike. "Let them go, but see that they take no more than the clothes upon their backs. Make certain that all their gold remains here with us. Their stores of food as well."

“Magnificence,” murmured Reznak mo Reznak, “we cannot know that these great nobles mean to join your enemies. More like they are simply making for their estates in the hills.”

“They will not mind us keeping their gold safe, then. There is nothing to buy in the hills.”

“They are afraid for their children,” Reznak said.

*Yes*, Daenerys thought, *and so am I*. “We must keep them safe as well. I will have two children from each of them. From the other pyramids as well. A boy and a girl.”

“Hostages,” said Skahaz, happily. “Pages and cupbearers. If the Great Masters make objection, explain to them that in Westeros it is a great honor for a child to be chosen to serve at court.” She left the rest unspoken. “Go and do as I’ve commanded. I have my dead to mourn.”

When she returned to her rooms atop the pyramid, she found Missandei crying softly on her pallet, trying as best she could to muffle the sound of her sobs. “Come sleep with me,” she told the little scribe. “Dawn will not come for hours yet.”

“Your Grace is kind to this one.” Missandei slipped under the sheets. “He was a good brother.”

Dany wrapped her arms about the girl. “Tell me of him.”

“He taught me how to climb a tree when we were little. He could catch fish with his hands. Once I found him sleeping in our garden with a hundred butterflies crawling over him. He looked so beautiful that morning, this one ... I mean, I loved him.”

“As he loved you.” Dany stroked the girl’s hair. “Say the word, my sweet, and I will send you from this awful place. I will find a ship somehow and send you home. To Naath.”

“I would sooner stay with you. On Naath I’d be afraid. What if the slavers came again? I feel safe when I’m with you.”

*Safe.* The word made Dany’s eyes fill up with tears. “I want to keep you safe.” Missandei was only a child. With her, she felt as if she could be a child too. “No one ever kept me safe when I was little. Well, Ser Willem did, but then he died, and Viserys ... I want to protect you but ... it is so hard. To be strong. I don’t always know what I should do. I *must* know, though. I am all they have. I am the queen ... the ... the ...”

“... mother,” whispered Missandei. “Mother to dragons.” Dany shivered. “No. Mother to us all.” Missandei hugged her tighter. “Your Grace should sleep. Dawn will be here soon, and court.”

“We’ll both sleep, and dream of sweeter days. Close your eyes.” When she did, Dany kissed her eyelids and made her giggle.

Kisses came easier than sleep, however. Dany shut her eyes and tried to think of home, of Dragonstone and King’s Landing and all the other places that Viserys had told her of, in a kinder land than this ... but her thoughts kept turning back to Slaver’s Bay, like ships caught in some bitter wind. When Missandei was sound asleep, Dany slipped from her arms and stepped out into the predawn air to lean upon the cool brick parapet and gaze out across the city. A thousand roofs stretched out below her, painted in shades of ivory and silver by the moon.

Somewhere beneath those roofs, the Sons of the Harpy were gathered, plotting ways to kill her and all those who loved her and put her children back in chains. Somewhere down there a hungry child was crying for milk. Somewhere an old woman lay dying. Somewhere a man and a maid embraced, and fumbled at each other’s clothes with eager hands. But up here there was only the sheen of moonlight on pyramids and pits, with no hint what lay beneath. Up here there was only her, alone.

She was the blood of the dragon. She could kill the Sons of the Harpy, and the sons of the sons, and the sons of the sons of the sons. But a dragon could not feed a hungry child nor help a dying woman’s pain. *And who would ever dare to love a dragon?*

She found herself thinking of Daario Naharis once again, Daario with his gold tooth and trident beard, his strong hands resting on the hilts of his matched *arakh* and stiletto, hilts wrought of gold in the shape of naked women. The day he took his leave of her, as she was bidding him farewell, he had brushed the balls of his thumbs lightly across them, back and forth. *I am jealous of a sword hilt*, she had realized, *of women made of gold*. Sending him to the Lamb Men had been wise. She was a queen, and Daario Naharis was not the stuff of kings.

“It has been so long,” she had said to Ser Barristan, just yesterday. “What if Daario has betrayed me and gone over to my enemies?” *Three treasons will you know*. “What if he met another woman, some princess of the Lhazarene?”

The old knight neither liked nor trusted Daario, she knew. Even so, he had answered gallantly. “There is no woman more lovely than Your Grace. Only a blind man could believe otherwise, and Daario Naharis was not blind.”

*No*, she thought. *His eyes are a deep blue, almost purple, and his gold tooth gleams when he smiles for me*.

Ser Barristan was sure he would return, though. Dany could only pray that he was right.

*A bath will help soothe me*. She padded barefoot through the grass to her terrace pool. The water felt cool on her skin, raising goosebumps. Little fish nibbled at her arms and legs. She closed her eyes and floated.

A soft rustle made her open them again. She sat up with a soft splash. “Missandei?” she called. “Irri? Jhiqui?”

“They sleep,” came the answer.

A woman stood under the persimmon tree, clad in a hooded robe that brushed the grass. Beneath the hood, her face seemed hard and shiny. *She is wearing a mask*, Dany knew, *a wooden mask finished in dark red lacquer*. “Quaithe? Am I dreaming?” She pinched her ear and winced at the pain. “I dreamt of you on *Balerion*, when first we came to Astapor.”

“You did not dream. Then or now.”

“What are you doing here? How did you get past my guards?”

“I came another way. Your guards never saw me.”

“If I call out, they will kill you.”

“They will swear to you that I am not here.”

“*Are* you here?”

“No. Hear me, Daenerys Targaryen. The glass candles are burning. Soon comes the pale mare, and after her the others. Kraken and dark flame, lion and griffin, the sun’s son and the mummer’s dragon. Trust none of them. Remember the Undying. Beware the perfumed seneschal.”

“Reznak? Why should I fear him?” Dany rose from the pool. Water trickled down her legs, and gooseflesh covered her arms in the cool night air. “If you have some warning for me, speak plainly. What do you want of me, Quaithe?”

Moonlight shone in the woman’s eyes. “To show you the way.”

“I remember the way. I go north to go south, east to go west, back to go forward. And to touch the light I have to pass beneath the shadow.” She squeezed the water from her silvery hair. “I am half-sick of riddling. In Qarth I was a beggar, but here I am a queen. I command you—”

“*Daenerys*. Remember the Undying. Remember who you are.”

“The blood of the dragon.” *But my dragons are roaring in the darkness.* “I remember the Undying. *Child of three*, they called me. Three mounts they promised me, three fires, and three treasons. One for blood and one for gold and one for ...”

“Your Grace?” Missandei stood in the door of the queen’s bedchamber, a lantern in her hand. “Who are you talking to?”

Dany glanced back toward the persimmon tree. There was no woman there. No hooded robe, no lacquer mask, no Quaithe.

*A shadow. A memory. No one.* She was the blood of the dragon, but Ser Barristan had warned her that in that blood there was a taint. *Could I be going mad?* They had called her father mad, once. “I was praying,” she told the Naathi girl. “It will be light soon. I had best eat something, before court.”

“I will bring you food to break your fast.”

Alone again, Dany went all the way around the pyramid in hopes of finding Quaithe, past the burned trees and scorched earth where her men had tried to capture Drogon. But the only sound was the wind in the fruit trees, and the only creatures in the gardens were a few pale moths.

Missandei returned with a melon and a bowl of hard-cooked eggs, but Dany found she had no appetite. As the sky lightened and the stars faded one by one, Irri and Jhiqui helped her don a *tokar* of violet silk fringed in gold.

When Reznak and Skahaz appeared, she found herself looking at them askance, mindful of the three treasons. *Beware the perfumed seneschal.* She sniffed suspiciously at Reznak mo Reznak. *I could command the Shavepate to arrest him and put him to the question.* Would that forestall the prophecy? Or would some other betrayer take his place? *Prophecies are treacherous*, she reminded herself, *and Reznak may be no more than he appears.*

In the purple hall, Dany found her ebon bench piled high about with satin pillows. The sight brought a wan smile to her lips. *Ser Barristan’s work*, she knew. The old knight was a good man, but sometimes very literal. *It was only a jape, ser*, she thought, but she sat on one of the pillows just the same.

Her sleepless night soon made itself felt. Before long she was fighting off a yawn as Reznak prattled about the craftsmen’s guilds. The stonemasons were wroth with her, it seemed. The bricklayers as well. Certain former slaves were carving stone and laying bricks, stealing work from guild journeymen and masters alike. “The freedmen work too cheaply,



Magnificence,” Reznak said. “Some call themselves journeymen, or even masters, titles that belong by rights only to the craftsmen of the guilds. The masons and the bricklayers do respectfully petition Your Worship to uphold their ancient rights and customs.”

“The freedmen work cheaply because they are hungry,” Dany pointed out. “If I forbid them to carve stone or lay bricks, the chandlers, the weavers, and the goldsmiths will soon be at my gates asking that they be excluded from those trades as well.” She considered a moment. “Let it be written that henceforth only guild members shall be permitted to name themselves journeymen or masters ... provided the guilds open their rolls to any freedman who can demonstrate the requisite skills.”

“So shall it be proclaimed,” said Reznak. “Will it please Your Worship to hear the noble Hizdahr zo Loraq?”

*Will he never admit defeat?* “Let him step forth.”

Hizdahr was not in a *tokar* today. Instead he wore a simple robe of grey and blue. He was shorn as well. *He has shaved off his beard and cut his hair*, she realized. The man had not gone shavepate, not quite, but at least those absurd wings of his were gone. “Your barber has served you well, Hizdahr. I hope you have come to show me his work and not to plague me further about the fighting pits.”

He made a deep obeisance. “Your Grace, I fear I must.”

Dany grimaced. Even her own people would give no rest about the matter. Reznak mo Reznak stressed the coin to be made through taxes. The Green Grace said that reopening the pits would please the gods. The Shavepate felt it would win her support against the Sons of the Harpy. “Let them fight,” grunted Strong Belwas, who had once been a champion in the pits. Ser Barristan suggested a tourney instead; his orphans could ride at rings and fight a *mêlée* with blunted weapons, he said, a suggestion Dany knew was as hopeless as it was well-intentioned. It was blood the Meereenese yearned to see, not skill. Elsewise the fighting slaves would have worn armor. Only the little scribe Missandei seemed to share the queen’s misgivings.

“I have refused you six times,” Dany reminded Hizdahr. “Your Radiance has seven gods, so perhaps she will look upon my seventh plea with favor. Today I do not come alone. Will you hear my friends? There are seven of them as well.” He brought them forth one by one. “Here is Khrazz. Here Barsena Blackhair, ever valiant. Here Camarron of the Count and Goghor the Giant. This is the Spotted Cat, this Fearless Ithoke. Last, Belaquo Bonebreaker. They have come to add their voices to mine own, and ask Your Grace to let our fighting pits reopen.”

Dany knew his seven, by name if not by sight. All had been amongst the most famed of Meereen’s fighting slaves ... and it had been the fighting slaves, freed from their shackles by her sewer rats, who led the uprising that won the city for her. She owed them a blood debt. “I will hear you,” she allowed.

One by one, each of them asked her to let the fighting pits reopen. “Why?” she demanded, when Ithoke had finished. “You are no longer slaves, doomed to die at a master’s whim. I freed you. Why should you wish to end your lives upon the scarlet sands?”

“I train since three,” said Goghor the Giant. “I kill since six. Mother of Dragons says I am free. Why not free to fight?”

“If it is fighting you want, fight for me. Swear your sword to the Mother’s Men or the Free Brothers or the Stalwart Shields. Teach my other freedmen how to fight.”

Goghor shook his head. “Before, I fight for master. You say, fight for you. I say, fight for me.” The huge man thumped his chest with a fist as big as a ham. “For gold. For glory.”

“Goghor speaks for us all.” The Spotted Cat wore a leopard skin across one shoulder. “The last time I was sold, the price was three hundred thousand honors. When I was a slave, I slept on furs and ate red meat off the bone. Now that I’m free, I sleep on straw and eat salt fish, when I can get it.”

“Hizdahr swears that the winners shall share half of all the coin collected at the gates,” said Khrazz. “*Half*, he swears it, and Hizdahr is an honorable

man.”

*No, a cunning man.* Daenerys felt trapped. “And the losers? What shall they receive?”

“Their names shall be graven on the Gates of Fate amongst the other valiant fallen,” declared Barsena. For eight years she had slain every other woman sent against her, it was said. “All men must die, and women too ... but not all will be remembered.”

Dany had no answer for that. *If this is truly what my people wish, do I have the right to deny it to them? It was their city before it was mine, and it is their own lives they wish to squander.* “I will consider all you’ve said. Thank you for your counsel.” She rose. “We will resume on the morrow.”

*“All kneel for Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Shackles, and Mother of Dragons,”* Missandei called.

Ser Barristan escorted her back up to her chambers. “Tell me a tale, ser,” Dany said as they climbed. “Some tale of valor with a happy ending.” She felt in need of happy endings. “Tell me how you escaped from the Usurper.”

“Your Grace. There is no valor in running for your life.”

Dany seated herself on a cushion, crossed her legs, and gazed up at him. “Please. It was the Young Usurper who dismissed you from the Kingsguard ...”

“Joffrey, aye. They gave my age for a reason, though the truth was otherwise. The boy wanted a white cloak for his dog Sandor Clegane and his mother wanted the Kingslayer to be her lord commander. When they told me, I ... I took off my cloak as they commanded, threw my sword at Joffrey’s feet, and spoke unwisely.”

“What did you say?”

“The truth ... but truth was never welcome at that court. I walked from the throne room with my head high, though I did not know where I was going. I had no home but White Sword Tower. My cousins would find a place for me at Harvest Hall, I knew, but I had no wish to bring Joffrey’s displeasure down upon them. I was gathering my things when it came to me that I had brought this on myself by taking Robert’s pardon. He was a good knight but a bad king, for he had no right to the throne he sat. That was when I knew that to redeem myself I must find the true king, and serve him loyally with all the strength that still remained me.”

“My brother Viserys.”

“Such was my intent. When I reached the stables the gold cloaks tried to seize me. Joffrey had offered me a tower to die in, but I had spurned his gift, so now he meant to offer me a dungeon. The commander of the City Watch himself confronted me, emboldened by my empty scabbard, but he had only three men with him and I still had my knife. I slashed one man’s face open when he laid his hands upon me, and rode through the others. As I spurred for the gates I heard Janos Slynt shouting for them to go after me. Once outside the Red Keep, the streets were congested, else I might have gotten away clean. Instead they caught me at the River Gate. The gold cloaks who had pursued me from the castle shouted for those at the gate to stop me, so they crossed their spears to bar my way.”

“And you without your sword? How did you get past them?”

“A true knight is worth ten guardsmen. The men at the gate were taken by surprise. I rode one down, wrenched away his spear, and drove it through the throat of my closest pursuer. The other broke off once I was through the gate, so I spurred my horse to a gallop and rode hellbent along the river until the city was lost to sight behind me. That night I traded my horse for a handful of pennies and some rags, and the next morning I joined the stream of smallfolk making their way to King’s Landing. I’d gone out the Mud Gate, so I returned through the Gate of the Gods, with dirt on my face, stubble on my cheeks, and no weapon but a wooden staff. In roughspun clothes and mud-caked boots, I was just one more old man fleeing the war. The gold cloaks took a stag from me and waved me through. King’s Landing was crowded with smallfolk who’d come seeking refuge from the

fighting. I lost myself amongst them. I had a little silver, but I needed that to pay my passage across the narrow sea, so I slept in septs and alleys and took my meals in pot shops. I let my beard grow out and cloaked myself in age. The day Lord Stark lost his head, I was there, watching. Afterward I went into the Great Sept and thanked the seven gods that Joffrey had stripped me of my cloak.”

“Stark was a traitor who met a traitor’s end.”

“Your Grace,” said Selmy, “Eddard Stark played a part in your father’s fall, but he bore you no ill will. When the eunuch Varys told us that you were with child, Robert wanted you killed, but Lord Stark spoke against it. Rather than countenance the murder of children, he told Robert to find himself another Hand.”

“Have you forgotten Princess Rhaenys and Prince Aegon?”

“Never. That was Lannister work, Your Grace.”

“Lannister or Stark, what difference? Viserys used to call them *the Usurper’s dogs*. If a child is set upon by a pack of hounds, does it matter which one tears out his throat? All the dogs are just as guilty. The guilt ...” The word caught in her throat. *Hazzea*, she thought, and suddenly she heard herself say, “I have to see the pit,” in a voice as small as a child’s whisper. “Take me down, ser, if you would.”

A flicker of disapproval crossed the old man’s face, but it was not his way to question his queen. “As you command.”

The servants’ steps were the quickest way down—not grand, but steep and straight and narrow, hidden in the walls. Ser Barristan brought a lantern, lest she fall. Bricks of twenty different colors pressed close around them, fading to grey and black beyond the lantern light. Thrice they passed Unsullied guards, standing as if they had been carved from stone. The only sound was the soft scruff of their feet upon the steps.

At ground level the Great Pyramid of Meereen was a hushed place, full of dust and shadows. Its outer walls were thirty feet thick. Within them,

sounds echoed off arches of many-colored bricks, and amongst the stables, stalls, and storerooms. They passed beneath three massive arches, down a torchlit ramp into the vaults beneath the pyramid, past cisterns, dungeons, and torture chambers where slaves had been scourged and skinned and burned with red-hot irons. Finally they came to a pair of huge iron doors with rusted hinges, guarded by Unsullied.

At her command, one produced an iron key. The door opened, hinges shrieking. Daenerys Targaryen stepped into the hot heart of darkness and stopped at the lip of a deep pit. Forty feet below, her dragons raised their heads. Four eyes burned through the shadows—two of molten gold and two of bronze.

Ser Barristan took her by the arm. “No closer.”

“You think they would harm *me*?”

“I do not know, Your Grace, but I would sooner not risk your person to learn the answer.”

When Rhaegal roared, a gout of yellow flame turned darkness into day for half a heartbeat. The fire licked along the walls, and Dany felt the heat upon her face, like the blast from an oven. Across the pit, Viserion’s wings unfolded, stirring the stale air. He tried to fly to her, but the chains snapped taut as he rose and slammed him down onto his belly. Links as big as a man’s fist bound his feet to the floor. The iron collar about his neck was fastened to the wall behind him. Rhaegal wore matching chains. In the light of Selmy’s lantern, his scales gleamed like jade. Smoke rose from between his teeth. Bones were scattered on the floor at his feet, cracked and scorched and splintered. The air was uncomfortably hot and smelled of sulfur and charred meat.

“They are larger.” Dany’s voice echoed off the scorched stone walls. A drop of sweat trickled down her brow and fell onto her breast. “Is it true that dragons never stop growing?”

“If they have food enough, and space to grow. Chained up in here, though ...”

The Great Masters had used the pit as a prison. It was large enough to hold five hundred men ... and more than ample for two dragons. *For how long, though? What will happen when they grow too large for the pit? Will they turn on one another with flame and claw? Will they grow wan and weak, with withered flanks and shrunken wings? Will their fires go out before the end?*

What sort of mother lets her children rot in darkness?

*If I look back, I am doomed*, Dany told herself ... but how could she not look back? *I should have seen it coming. Was I so blind, or did I close my eyes willfully, so I would not have to see the price of power?*

Viserys had told her all the tales when she was little. He loved to talk of dragons. She knew how Harrenhal had fallen. She knew about the Field of Fire and the Dance of the Dragons. One of her forebears, the third Aegon, had seen his own mother devoured by his uncle's dragon. And there were songs beyond count of villages and kingdoms that lived in dread of dragons till some brave dragonslayer rescued them. At Astapor the slaver's eyes had melted. On the road to Yunkai, when Daario tossed the heads of Sallor the Bald and Prendahl na Ghezn at her feet, her children made a feast of them. Dragons had no fear of men. And a dragon large enough to gorge on sheep could take a child just as easily.

Her name had been Hazzea. She was four years old. *Unless her father lied. He might have lied.* No one had seen the dragon but him. His proof was burned bones, but burned bones proved nothing. He might have killed the little girl himself, and burned her afterward. He would not have been the first father to dispose of an unwanted girl child, the Shavepate claimed. *The Sons of the Harpy might have done it, and made it look like dragon's work to make the city hate me.* Dany wanted to believe that ... but if that was so, why had Hazzea's father waited until the audience hall was almost empty to come forward? If his purpose had been to inflame the Meereenese against her, he would have told his tale when the hall was full of ears to hear.

The Shavepate had urged her to put the man to death. "At least rip out his tongue. This man's lie could destroy us all, Magnificence." Instead Dany chose to pay the blood price. No one could tell her the worth of a daughter,

so she set it at one hundred times the worth of a lamb. “I would give Hazzea back to you if I could,” she told the father, “but some things are beyond the power of even a queen. Her bones shall be laid to rest in the Temple of the Graces, and a hundred candles shall burn day and night in her memory. Come back to me each year upon her nameday, and your other children shall not want ... but this tale must never pass your lips again.”

“Men will ask,” the grieving father had said. “They will ask me where Hazzea is and how she died.”

“She died of a snakebite,” Reznak mo Reznak insisted. “A ravening wolf carried her off. A sudden sickness took her. Tell them what you will, but never speak of dragons.”

Viserion’s claws scrabbled against the stones, and the huge chains rattled as he tried to make his way to her again. When he could not, he gave a roar, twisted his head back as far as he was able, and spat golden flame at the wall behind him. *How soon till his fire burns hot enough to crack stone and melt iron?*

Once, not long ago, he had ridden on her shoulder, his tail coiled round her arm. Once she had fed him morsels of charred meat from her own hand. He had been the first chained up. Daenerys had led him to the pit herself and shut him up inside with several oxen. Once he had gorged himself he grew drowsy. They had chained him whilst he slept.

Rhaegal had been harder. Perhaps he could hear his brother raging in the pit, despite the walls of brick and stone between them. In the end, they had to cover him with a net of heavy iron chain as he basked on her terrace, and he fought so fiercely that it had taken three days to carry him down the servants’ steps, twisting and snapping. Six men had been burned in the struggle.

And Drogon ...

*The winged shadow*, the grieving father called him. He was the largest of her three, the fiercest, the wildest, with scales as black as night and eyes like pits of fire.



Drogon hunted far afield, but when he was sated he liked to bask in the sun at the apex of the Great Pyramid, where once the harpy of Meereen had stood. Thrice they had tried to take him there, and thrice they had failed. Two score of her bravest had risked themselves trying to capture him. Almost all had suffered burns, and four of them had died. The last she had seen of Drogon had been at sunset on the night of the third attempt. The black dragon had been flying north across the Skahazadhan toward the tall grasses of the Dothraki sea. He had not returned.

*Mother of dragons, Daenerys thought. Mother of monsters. What have I unleashed upon the world? A queen I am, but my throne is made of burned bones, and it rests on quicksand. Without dragons, how could she hope to hold Meereen, much less win back Westeros? I am the blood of the dragon, she thought. If they are monsters, so am I.*