



DAENERYS

In the center of the Plaza of Pride stood a red brick fountain whose waters smelled of brimstone, and in the center of the fountain a monstrous harpy made of hammered bronze. Twenty feet tall she reared. She had a woman's face, with gilded hair, ivory eyes, and pointed ivory teeth. Water gushed yellow from her heavy breasts. But in place of arms she had the wings of a bat or a dragon, her legs were the legs of an eagle, and behind she wore a scorpion's curled and venomous tail.

The harpy of Ghis, Dany thought. Old Ghis had fallen five thousand years ago, if she remembered true; its legions shattered by the might of young Valyria, its brick walls pulled down, its streets and buildings turned to ash and cinder by dragonflame, its very fields sown with salt, sulfur, and skulls. The gods of Ghis were dead, and so too its people; these Astapori were mongrels, Ser Jorah said. Even the Ghiscari tongue was largely forgotten; the slave cities spoke the High Valyrian of their conquerors, or what they had made of it.

Yet the symbol of the Old Empire still endured here, though this bronze monster had a heavy chain dangling from her talons, an open manacle at either end. *The harpy of Ghis had a thunderbolt in her claws. This is the harpy of Astapor.*

"Tell the Westerosi whore to lower her eyes," the slaver Kraznys mo Nakloz complained to the slave girl who spoke for him. "I deal in meat, not

metal. The bronze is not for sale. Tell her to look at the soldiers. Even the dim purple eyes of a sunset savage can see how magnificent my creatures are, surely.”

Kraznys’s High Valyrian was twisted and thickened by the characteristic growl of Ghis, and flavored here and there with words of slaver argot. Dany understood him well enough, but she smiled and looked blankly at the slave girl, as if wondering what he might have said.

“The Good Master Kraznys asks, are they not magnificent?” The girl spoke the Common Tongue well, for one who had never been to Westeros. No older than ten, she had the round flat face, dusky skin, and golden eyes of Naath. *The Peaceful People*, her folk were called. All agreed that they made the best slaves.

“They might be adequate to my needs,” Dany answered. It had been Ser Jorah’s suggestion that she speak only Dothraki and the Common Tongue while in Astapor. *My bear is more clever than he looks*. “Tell me of their training.”

“The Westerosi woman is pleased with them, but speaks no praise, to keep the price down,” the translator told her master. “She wishes to know how they were trained.”

Kraznys mo Nakloz bobbed his head. He smelled as if he’d bathed in raspberries, this slaver, and his jutting red-black beard glistened with oil. *He has larger breasts than I do*, Dany reflected. She could see them through the thin sea-green silk of the gold-fringed *tokar* he wound about his body and over one shoulder. His left hand held the *tokar* in place as he walked, while his right clasped a short leather whip. “Are all Westerosi pigs so ignorant?” he complained. “All the world knows that the Unsullied are masters of spear and shield and shortsword.” He gave Dany a broad smile. “Tell her what she would know, slave, and be quick about it. The day is hot.”

That much at least is no lie. A matched pair of slave girls stood behind them, holding a striped silk awning over their heads, but even in the shade Dany felt light-headed, and Kraznys was perspiring freely. The Plaza of Pride had been baking in the sun since dawn. Even through the thickness of her sandals, she could feel the warmth of the red bricks underfoot. Waves of

heat rose off them shimmering to make the stepped pyramids of Astapor around the plaza seem half a dream.

If the Unsullied felt the heat, however, they gave no hint of it. *They could be made of brick themselves, the way they stand there.* A thousand had been marched out of their barracks for her inspection; drawn up in ten ranks of one hundred before the fountain and its great bronze harpy, they stood stiffly at attention, their stony eyes fixed straight ahead. They wore nought but white linen clouts knotted about their loins, and conical bronze helms topped with a sharpened spike a foot tall. Kraznys had commanded them to lay down their spears and shields, and doff their swordbelts and quilted tunics, so the Queen of Westeros might better inspect the lean hardness of their bodies.

“They are chosen young, for size and speed and strength,” the slave told her. “They begin their training at five. Every day they train from dawn to dusk, until they have mastered the shortsword, the shield, and the three spears. The training is most rigorous, Your Grace. Only one boy in three survives it. This is well known. Among the Unsullied it is said that on the day they win their spiked cap, the worst is done with, for no duty that will ever fall to them could be as hard as their training.”

Kraznys mo Nakloz supposedly spoke no word of the Common Tongue, but he bobbed his head as he listened, and from time to time gave the slave girl a poke with the end of his lash. “Tell her that these have been standing here for a day and a night, with no food nor water. Tell her that they will stand until they drop if I should command it, and when nine hundred and ninety-nine have collapsed to die upon the bricks, the last will stand there still, and never move until his own death claims him. Such is their courage. Tell her that.”

“I call that madness, not courage,” said Arstan Whitebeard, when the solemn little scribe was done. He tapped the end of his hardwood staff against the bricks, *tap tap*, as if to tell his displeasure. The old man had not wanted to sail to Astapor; nor did he favor buying this slave army. A queen should hear all sides before reaching a decision. That was why Dany had brought him with her to the Plaza of Pride, not to keep her safe. Her bloodriders would do that well enough. Ser Jorah Mormont she had left aboard *Balerion* to guard her people and her dragons. Much against her

inclination, she had locked the dragons belowdecks. It was too dangerous to let them fly freely over the city; the world was all too full of men who would gladly kill them for no better reason than to name themselves *dragonslayer*.

“What did the smelly old man say?” the slaver demanded of his translator. When she told him, he smiled and said, “Inform the savages that we call this *obedience*. Others may be stronger or quicker or larger than the Unsullied. Some few may even equal their skill with sword and spear and shield. But nowhere between the seas will you ever find any more obedient.”

“Sheep are obedient,” said Arstan when the words had been translated. He had some Valyrian as well, though not so much as Dany, but like her he was feigning ignorance.

Kraznys mo Nakloz showed his big white teeth when that was rendered back to him. “A word from me and these sheep would spill his stinking old bowels on the bricks,” he said, “but do not say that. Tell them that these creatures are more dogs than sheep. Do they eat dogs or horse in these Seven Kingdoms?”

“They prefer pigs and cows, your worship.”

“Beef. Pfag. Food for unwashed savages.”

Ignoring them all, Dany walked slowly down the line of slave soldiers. The girls followed close behind with the silk awning, to keep her in the shade, but the thousand men before her enjoyed no such protection. More than half had the copper skins and almond eyes of Dothraki and Lhazerene, but she saw men of the Free Cities in the ranks as well, along with pale Qartheen, ebon-faced Summer Islanders, and others whose origins she could not guess. And some had skins of the same amber hue as Kraznys mo Nakloz, and the bristly red-black hair that marked the ancient folk of Ghis, who named themselves the harpy’s sons. *They sell even their own kind*. It should not have surprised her. The Dothraki did the same, when *khalasar* met *khalasar* in the sea of grass.

Some of the soldiers were tall and some were short. They ranged in age from fourteen to twenty, she judged. Their cheeks were smooth, and their eyes all the same, be they black or brown or blue or grey or amber. *They are*

like one man, Dany thought, until she remembered that they were no men at all. The Unsullied were eunuchs, every one of them. “Why do you cut them?” she asked Kraznys through the slave girl. “Whole men are stronger than eunuchs, I have always heard.”

“A eunuch who is cut young will never have the brute strength of one of your Westerosi knights, this is true,” said Kraznys mo Nakloz when the question was put to him. “A bull is strong as well, but bulls die every day in the fighting pits. A girl of nine killed one not three days past in Jothiel’s Pit. The Unsullied have something better than strength, tell her. They have discipline. We fight in the fashion of the Old Empire, yes. They are the lockstep legions of Old Ghis come again, absolutely obedient, absolutely loyal, and utterly without fear.”

Dany listened patiently to the translation.

“Even the bravest men fear death and maiming,” Arstan said when the girl was done.

Kraznys smiled again when he heard that. “Tell the old man that he smells of piss, and needs a stick to hold him up.”

“Truly, your worship?”

He poked her with his lash. “No, not truly, are you a girl or a goat, to ask such folly? Say that Unsullied are not men. Say that death means nothing to them, and maiming less than nothing.” He stopped before a thickset man who had the look of Lhazar about him and brought his whip up sharply, laying a line of blood across one copper cheek. The eunuch blinked, and stood there, bleeding. “Would you like another?” asked Kraznys.

“If it please your worship.”

It was hard to pretend not to understand. Dany laid a hand on Kraznys’s arm before he could raise the whip again. “Tell the Good Master that I see how strong his Unsullied are, and how bravely they suffer pain.”

Kraznys chuckled when he heard her words in Valyrian. “Tell this ignorant whore of a westerner that courage has nothing to do with it.”

“The Good Master says that was not courage, Your Grace.”

“Tell her to open those slut’s eyes of hers.”

“He begs you attend this carefully, Your Grace.”

Kraznys moved to the next eunuch in line, a towering youth with the blue eyes and flaxen hair of Lys. “Your sword,” he said. The eunuch knelt, unsheathed the blade, and offered it up hilt first. It was a short-sword, made more for stabbing than for slashing, but the edge looked razor-sharp. “Stand,” Kraznys commanded.

“Your worship.” The eunuch stood, and Kraznys mo Nakloz slid the sword slowly up his torso, leaving a thin red line across his belly and between his ribs. Then he jabbed the swordpoint in beneath a wide pink nipple and began to work it back and forth.

“What is he doing?” Dany demanded of the girl, as the blood ran down the man’s chest.

“Tell the cow to stop her bleating,” said Kraznys, without waiting for the translation. “This will do him no great harm. Men have no need of nipples, eunuchs even less so.” The nipple hung by a thread of skin. He slashed, and sent it tumbling to the bricks, leaving behind a round red eye copiously weeping blood. The eunuch did not move, until Kraznys offered him back his sword, hilt first. “Here, I’m done with you.”

“This one is pleased to have served you.”

Kraznys turned back to Dany. “They feel no pain, you see.”

“How can that be?” she demanded through the scribe.

“*The wine of courage*,” was the answer he gave her. “It is no true wine at all, but made from deadly nightshade, bloodfly larva, black lotus root, and many secret things. They drink it with every meal from the day they are cut, and with each passing year feel less and less. It makes them fearless in battle. Nor can they be tortured. Tell the savage her secrets are safe with the Unsullied. She may set them to guard her councils and even her bedchamber, and never a worry as to what they might overhear.

“In Yunkai and Meereen, eunuchs are often made by removing a boy’s testicles, but leaving the penis. Such a creature is infertile, yet often still capable of erection. Only trouble can come of this. We remove the penis as well, leaving nothing. The Unsullied are the purest creatures on the earth.” He gave Dany and Arstan another of his broad white smiles. “I have heard that in the Sunset Kingdoms men take solemn vows to keep chaste and father no children, but live only for their duty. Is it not so?”

“It is,” Arstan said, when the question was put. “There are many such orders. The maesters of the Citadel, the septons and septas who serve the Seven, the silent sisters of the dead, the Kingsguard and the Night’s Watch . . .”

“Poor things,” growled the slaver, after the translation. “Men were not made to live thus. Their days are a torment of temptation, any fool must see, and no doubt most succumb to their baser selves. Not so our Unsullied. They are wed to their swords in a way that your Sworn Brothers cannot hope to match. No woman can ever tempt them, nor any man.”

His girl conveyed the essence of his speech, more politely. “There are other ways to tempt men, besides the flesh,” Arstan Whitebeard objected, when she was done.

“Men, yes, but not Unsullied. Plunder interests them no more than rape. They own nothing but their weapons. We do not even permit them names.”

“No names?” Dany frowned at the little scribe. “Can that be what the Good Master said? They have no names?”

“It is so, Your Grace.”

Kraznys stopped in front of a Ghiscari who might have been his taller fitter brother, and flicked his lash at a small bronze disk on the swordbelt at his feet. “There is his name. Ask the whore of Westeros whether she can read Ghiscari glyphs.” When Dany admitted that she could not, the slaver turned to the Unsullied. “What is your name?” he demanded.

“This one’s name is Red Flea, your worship.”

The girl repeated their exchange in the Common Tongue.

“And yesterday, what was it?”

“Black Rat, your worship.”

“The day before?”

“Brown Flea, your worship.”

“Before that?”

“This one does not recall, your worship. Blue Toad, perhaps. Or Blue Worm.”

“Tell her all their names are such,” Kraznys commanded the girl. “It reminds them that by themselves they are vermin. The name disks are thrown in an empty cask at duty’s end, and each dawn plucked up again at random.”

“More madness,” said Arstan, when he heard. “How can any man possibly remember a new name every day?”

“Those who cannot are culled in training, along with those who cannot run all day in full pack, scale a mountain in the black of night, walk across a bed of coals, or slay an infant.”

Dany’s mouth surely twisted at that. *Did he see, or is he blind as well as cruel?* She turned away quickly, trying to keep her face a mask until she heard the translation. Only then did she allow herself to say, “Whose infants do they slay?”

“To win his spiked cap, an Unsullied must go to the slave marts with a silver mark, find some wailing newborn, and kill it before its mother’s eyes. In this way, we make certain that there is no weakness left in them.”

She was feeling faint. *The heat*, she tried to tell herself. “You take a babe from its mother’s arms, kill it as she watches, and pay for her pain with a silver coin?”

When the translation was made for him, Kraznys mo Nakloz laughed aloud. “What a soft mewling fool this one is. Tell the whore of Westeros that the mark is for the child’s owner, not the mother. The Unsullied are not permitted to steal.” He tapped his whip against his leg. “Tell her that few ever fail that test. The dogs are harder for them, it must be said. We give each boy a puppy on the day that he is cut. At the end of the first year, he is required to strangle it. Any who cannot are killed, and fed to the surviving dogs. It makes for a good strong lesson, we find.”

Arstan Whitebeard tapped the end of his staff on the bricks as he listened to that. *Tap tap tap*. Slow and steady. *Tap tap tap*. Dany saw him turn his eyes away, as if he could not bear to look at Kraznys any longer.

“The Good Master has said that these eunuchs cannot be tempted with coin or flesh,” Dany told the girl, “but if some enemy of mine should offer them *freedom* for betraying me . . .”

“They would kill him out of hand and bring her his head, tell her that,” the slaver answered. “Other slaves may steal and hoard up silver in hopes of buying freedom, but an Unsullied would not take it if the little mare offered it as a gift. They have no life outside their duty. They are *soldiers*, and that is all.”

“It is soldiers I need,” Dany admitted.

“Tell her it is well she came to Astapor, then. Ask her how large an army she wishes to buy.”

“How many Unsullied do you have to sell?”

“Eight thousand fully trained and available at present. We sell them only by the unit, she should know. By the thousand or the century. Once we sold by the ten, as household guards, but that proved unsound. Ten is too few. They mingle with other slaves, even freemen, and forget who and what they are.” Kraznys waited for that to be rendered in the Common Tongue, and then continued. “This beggar queen must understand, such wonders do not come cheaply. In Yunkai and Meereen, slave swordsmen can be had for less than the price of their swords, but Unsullied are the finest foot in all the world, and each represents many years of training. Tell her they are like Valyrian steel, folded over and over and hammered for years on end, until they are stronger and more resilient than any metal on earth.”

“I know of Valyrian steel,” said Dany. “Ask the Good Master if the Unsullied have their own officers.”

“You must set your own officers over them. We train them to obey, not to think. If it is wits she wants, let her buy scribes.”

“And their gear?”

“Sword, shield, spear, sandals, and quilted tunic are included,” said Kraznys. “And the spiked caps, to be sure. They will wear such armor as you wish, but you must provide it.”

Dany could think of no other questions. She looked at Arstan. “You have lived long in the world, Whitebeard. Now that you have seen them, what do you say?”

“I say *no*, Your Grace,” the old man answered at once.

“Why?” she asked. “Speak freely.” Dany thought she knew what he would say, but she wanted the slave girl to hear, so Kraznys mo Nakloz might hear later.

“My queen,” said Arstan, “there have been no slaves in the Seven Kingdoms for thousands of years. The old gods and the new alike hold slavery to be an abomination. Evil. If you should land in Westeros at the head of a slave army, many good men will oppose you for no other reason than that. You will do great harm to your cause, and to the honor of your House.”

“Yet I must have some army,” Dany said. “The boy Joffrey will not give me the Iron Throne for asking politely.”

“When the day comes that you raise your banners, half of Westeros will be with you,” Whitebeard promised. “Your brother Rhaegar is still remembered, with great love.”

“And my father?” Dany said.

The old man hesitated before saying, “King Aerys is also remembered. He gave the realm many years of peace. Your Grace, you have no need of slaves. Magister Illyrio can keep you safe while your dragons grow, and send secret envoys across the narrow sea on your behalf, to sound out the high lords for your cause.”

“Those same high lords who abandoned my father to the Kingslayer and bent the knee to Robert the Usurper?”

“Even those who bent their knees may yearn in their hearts for the return of the dragons.”

“*May*,” said Dany. That was such a slippery word, *may*. In any language. She turned back to Kraznys mo Nakloz and his slave girl. “I must consider carefully.”

The slaver shrugged. “Tell her to consider quickly. There are many other buyers. Only three days past I showed these same Unsullied to a corsair king who hopes to buy them all.”

“The corsair wanted only a hundred, your worship,” Dany heard the slave girl say.

He poked her with the end of the whip. “Consairs are all liars. He’ll buy them all. Tell her that, girl.”

Dany knew she would take more than a hundred, if she took any at all. “Remind your Good Master of who I am. Remind him that I am Daenerys Stormborn, Mother of Dragons, the Unburnt, trueborn queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. My blood is the blood of Aegon the Conqueror, and of old Valyria before him.”

Yet her words did not move the plump perfumed slaver, even when rendered in his own ugly tongue. “Old Ghis ruled an empire when the Valyrians were still fucking sheep,” he growled at the poor little scribe, “and we are the sons of the harpy.” He gave a shrug. “My tongue is wasted wagging at women. East or west, it makes no matter, they cannot decide until they have been pampered and flattered and stuffed with sweetmeats. Well, if this is my fate, so be it. Tell the whore that if she requires a guide to our sweet city, Kraznys mo Nakloz will gladly serve her . . . and service her as well, if she is more woman than she looks.”

“Good Master Kraznys would be most pleased to show you Astapor while you ponder, Your Grace,” the translator said.

“I will feed her jellied dog brains, and a fine rich stew of red octopus and unborn puppy.” He wiped his lips.

“Many delicious dishes can be had here, he says.”

“Tell her how pretty the pyramids are at night,” the slaver growled. “Tell her I will lick honey off her breasts, or allow her to lick honey off mine if she prefers.”

“Astapor is most beautiful at dusk, Your Grace,” said the slave girl. “The Good Masters light silk lanterns on every terrace, so all the pyramids glow with colored lights. Pleasure barges ply the Worm, playing soft music and calling at the little islands for food and wine and other delights.”

“Ask her if she wishes to view our fighting pits,” Kraznys added. “Douquor’s Pit has a fine folly scheduled for the evening. A bear and three small boys. One boy will be rolled in honey, one in blood, and one in rotting fish, and she may wager on which the bear will eat first.”

Tap tap tap, Dany heard. Arstan Whitebeard's face was still, but his staff beat out his rage. *Tap tap tap*. She made herself smile. "I have my own bear on *Balerion*," she told the translator, "and he may well eat me if I do not return to him."

"See," said Kraznys when her words were translated. "It is not the woman who decides, it is this man she runs to. As ever!"

"Thank the Good Master for his patient kindness," Dany said, "and tell him that I will think on all I learned here." She gave her arm to Arstan Whitebeard, to lead her back across the plaza to her litter. Aggo and Jhogo fell in to either side of them, walking with the bowlegged swagger all the horselords affected when forced to dismount and stride the earth like common mortals.

Dany climbed into her litter frowning, and beckoned Arstan to climb in beside her. A man as old as him should not be walking in such heat. She did not close the curtains as they got under way. With the sun beating down so fiercely on this city of red brick, every stray breeze was to be cherished, even if it did come with a swirl of fine red dust. *Besides, I need to see.*

Astapor was a queer city, even to the eyes of one who had walked within the House of Dust and bathed in the Womb of the World beneath the Mother of Mountains. All the streets were made of the same red brick that had paved the plaza. So too were the stepped pyramids, the deep-dug fighting pits with their rings of descending seats, the sulfurous fountains and gloomy wine caves, and the ancient walls that encircled them. *So many bricks*, she thought, *and so old and crumbling*. Their fine red dust was everywhere, dancing down the gutters at each gust of wind. Small wonder so many Astapori women veiled their faces; the brick dust stung the eyes worse than sand.

"Make way!" Jhogo shouted as he rode before her litter. "Make way for the Mother of Dragons!" But when he uncoiled the great silver-handled whip that Dany had given him, and made to crack it in the air, she leaned out and told him nay. "Not in this place, blood of my blood," she said, in his own tongue. "These bricks have heard too much of the sound of whips."

The streets had been largely deserted when they had set out from the port that morning, and scarcely seemed more crowded now. An elephant

lumbered past with a latticework litter on its back. A naked boy with peeling skin sat in a dry brick gutter, picking his nose and staring sullenly at some ants in the street. He lifted his head at the sound of hooves, and gaped as a column of mounted guards trotted by in a cloud of red dust and brittle laughter. The copper disks sewn to their cloaks of yellow silk glittered like so many suns, but their tunics were embroidered linen, and below the waist they wore sandals and pleated linen skirts. Bareheaded, each man had teased and oiled and twisted his stiff red-black hair into some fantastic shape, horns and wings and blades and even grasping hands, so they looked like some troupe of demons escaped from the seventh hell. The naked boy watched them for a bit, along with Dany, but soon enough they were gone, and he went back to his ants, and a knuckle up his nose.

An old city, this, she reflected, but not so populous as it was in its glory, nor near so crowded as Qarth or Pentos or Lys.

Her litter came to a sudden halt at the cross street, to allow a coffle of slaves to shuffle across her path, urged along by the crack of an overseer's lash. These were no Unsullied, Dany noted, but a more common sort of men, with pale brown skins and black hair. There were women among them, but no children. All were naked. Two Astapori rode behind them on white asses, a man in a red silk *tokar* and a veiled woman in sheer blue linen decorated with flakes of lapis lazuli. In her red-black hair she wore an ivory comb. The man laughed as he whispered to her, paying no more mind to Dany than to his slaves, nor the overseer with his twisted five-thonged lash, a squat broad Dothraki who had the harpy and chains tattooed proudly across his muscular chest.

"Bricks and blood built Astapor," Whitebeard murmured at her side, "and bricks and blood her people."

"What is that?" Dany asked him, curious.

"An old rhyme a maester taught me, when I was a boy. I never knew how true it was. The bricks of Astapor are red with the blood of the slaves who make them."

"I can well believe that," said Dany.

"Then leave this place before your heart turns to brick as well. Sail this very night, on the evening tide."

Would that I could, thought Dany. “When I leave Astapor it must be with an army, Ser Jorah says.”

“Ser Jorah was a slaver himself, Your Grace,” the old man reminded her. “There are sellswords in Pentos and Myr and Tyrosh you can hire. A man who kills for coin has no honor, but at least they are no slaves. Find your army there, I beg you.”

“My brother visited Pentos, Myr, Braavos, near all the Free Cities. The magisters and archons fed him wine and promises, but his soul was starved to death. A man cannot sup from the beggar’s bowl all his life and stay a man. I had my taste in Qarth, that was enough. I will not come to Pentos bowl in hand.”

“Better to come a beggar than a slaver,” Arstan said.

“There speaks one who has been neither.” Dany’s nostrils flared. “Do you know what it is like to be *sold*, squire? I do. My brother sold me to Khal Drogo for the promise of a golden crown. Well, Drogo crowned him in gold, though not as he had wished, and I . . . my sun-and-stars made a queen of me, but if he had been a different man, it might have been much otherwise. Do you think I have forgotten how it felt to be afraid?”

Whitebeard bowed his head. “Your Grace, I did not mean to give offense.”

“Only lies offend me, never honest counsel.” Dany patted Arstan’s spotted hand to reassure him. “I have a dragon’s temper, that’s all. You must not let it frighten you.”

“I shall try and remember.” Whitebeard smiled.

He has a good face, and great strength to him, Dany thought. She could not understand why Ser Jorah mistrusted the old man so. *Could he be jealous that I have found another man to talk to?* Unbidden, her thoughts went back to the night on *Balerion* when the exile knight had kissed her. *He should never have done that. He is thrice my age, and of too low a birth for me, and I never gave him leave. No true knight would ever kiss a queen without her leave.* She had taken care never to be alone with Ser Jorah after that, keeping her handmaids with her aboard ship, and sometimes her bloodriders. *He wants to kiss me again, I see it in his eyes.*

What Dany wanted she could not begin to say, but Jorah's kiss had woken something in her, something that had been sleeping since Khal Drogo died. Lying abed in her narrow bunk, she found herself wondering how it would be to have a man squeezed in beside her in place of her handmaid, and the thought was more exciting than it should have been. Sometimes she would close her eyes and dream of him, but it was never Jorah Mormont she dreamed of; her lover was always younger and more comely, though his face remained a shifting shadow.

Once, so tormented she could not sleep, Dany slid a hand down between her legs, and gasped when she felt how wet she was. Scarce daring to breathe, she moved her fingers back and forth between her lower lips, slowly so as not to wake Irri beside her, until she found one sweet spot and lingered there, touching herself lightly, timidly at first and then faster. Still, the relief she wanted seemed to recede before her, until her dragons stirred, and one screamed out across the cabin, and Irri woke and saw what she was doing.

Dany knew her face was flushed, but in the darkness Irri surely could not tell. Wordless, the handmaid put a hand on her breast, then bent to take a nipple in her mouth. Her other hand drifted down across the soft curve of belly, through the mound of fine silvery-gold hair, and went to work between Dany's thighs. It was no more than a few moments until her legs twisted and her breasts heaved and her whole body shuddered. She screamed then. Or perhaps that was Drogon. Irri never said a thing, only curled back up and went back to sleep the instant the thing was done.

The next day, it all seemed a dream. And what did Ser Jorah have to do with it, if anything? *It is Drogo I want, my sun-and-stars*, Dany reminded herself. *Not Irri, and not Ser Jorah, only Drogo*. Drogo was dead, though. She'd thought these feelings had died with him there in the red waste, but one treacherous kiss had somehow brought them back to life. *He should never have kissed me. He presumed too much, and I permitted it. It must never happen again*. She set her mouth grimly and gave her head a shake, and the bell in her braid chimed softly.

Closer to the bay, the city presented a fairer face. The great brick pyramids lined the shore, the largest four hundred feet high. All manner of trees and vines and flowers grew on their broad terraces, and the winds that

swirled around them smelled green and fragrant. Another gigantic harpy stood atop the gate, this one made of baked red clay and crumbling visibly, with no more than a stub of her scorpion's tail remaining. The chain she grasped in her clay claws was old iron, rotten with rust. It was cooler down by the water, though. The lapping of the waves against the rotting pilings made a curiously soothing sound.

Aggo helped Dany down from her litter. Strong Belwas was seated on a massive piling, eating a great haunch of brown roasted meat. "Dog," he said happily when he saw Dany. "Good dog in Astapor, little queen. Eat?" He offered it with a greasy grin.

"That is kind of you, Belwas, but no." Dany had eaten dog in other places, at other times, but just now all she could think of was the Unsullied and their stupid puppies. She swept past the huge eunuch and up the plank onto the deck of *Balerion*.

Ser Jorah Mormont stood waiting for her. "Your Grace," he said, bowing his head. "The slavers have come and gone. Three of them, with a dozen scribes and as many slaves to lift and fetch. They crawled over every foot of our holds and made note of all we had." He walked her aft. "How many men do they have for sale?"

"None." Was it Mormont she was angry with, or this city with its sullen heat, its stinks and sweats and crumbling bricks? "They sell eunuchs, not men. Eunuchs made of brick, like the rest of Astapor. Shall I buy eight thousand brick eunuchs with dead eyes that never move, who kill suckling babes for the sake of a spiked hat and strangle their own dogs? They don't even have names. So don't call them *men*, ser."

"*Khaleesi*," he said, taken aback by her fury, "the Unsullied are chosen as boys, and trained—"

"I have heard all I care to of their *training*." Dany could feel tears welling in her eyes, sudden and unwanted. Her hand flashed up and cracked Ser Jorah hard across the face. It was either that, or cry.

Mormont touched the cheek she'd slapped. "If I have displeased my queen—"

"You *have*. You've displeased me greatly, ser. If you were my true knight, you would never have brought me to this vile sty." *If you were my*

true knight, you would never have kissed me, or looked at my breasts the way you did, or . . .

“As Your Grace commands. I shall tell Captain Groleo to make ready to sail on the evening tide, for some sty less vile.”

“No,” said Dany. Groleo watched them from the forecandle, and his crew was watching too. Whitebeard, her bloodriders, Jhiqui, every one had stopped what they were doing at the sound of the slap. “I want to sail *now*, not on the tide, I want to sail far and fast and never look back. But I can’t, can I? There are eight thousand brick eunuchs for sale, and I must find some way to buy them.” And with that she left him, and went below.

Behind the carved wooden door of the captain’s cabin, her dragons were restless. Drogon raised his head and screamed, pale smoke venting from his nostrils, and Viserion flapped at her and tried to perch on her shoulder, as he had when he was smaller. “No,” Dany said, trying to shrug him off gently. “You’re too big for that now, sweetling.” But the dragon coiled his white and gold tail around one arm and dug black claws into the fabric of her sleeve, clinging tightly. Helpless, she sank into Groleo’s great leather chair, giggling.

“They have been wild while you were gone, *Khaleesi*,” Irri told her. “Viserion clawed splinters from the door, do you see? And Drogon made to escape when the slaver men came to see them. When I grabbed his tail to hold him back, he turned and bit me.” She showed Dany the marks of his teeth on her hand.

“Did any of them try to burn their way free?” That was the thing that frightened Dany the most.

“No, *Khaleesi*. Drogon breathed his fire, but in the empty air. The slaver men feared to come near him.”

She kissed Irri’s hand where Drogon had bitten it. “I’m sorry he hurt you. Dragons are not meant to be locked up in a small ship’s cabin.”

“Dragons are like horses in this,” Irri said. “And riders, too. The horses scream below, *Khaleesi*, and kick at the wooden walls. I hear them. And Jhiqui says the old women and the little ones scream too, when you are not here. They do not like this water cart. They do not like the black salt sea.”

“I know,” Dany said. “I do, I know.”

“My *khaleesi* is sad?”

“Yes,” Dany admitted. *Sad and lost.*

“Should I pleasure the *khaleesi*?”

Dany stepped away from her. “No. Irri, you do not need to do that. What happened that night, when you woke . . . you’re no bed slave, I freed you, remember? You . . .”

“I am handmaid to the Mother of Dragons,” the girl said. “It is great honor to please my *khaleesi*.”

“I don’t want that,” she insisted. “I don’t.” She turned away sharply. “Leave me now. I want to be alone. To think.”

Dusk had begun to settle over the waters of Slaver’s Bay before Dany returned to the deck. She stood by the rail and looked out over Astapor. *From here it looks almost beautiful*, she thought. The stars were coming out above, and the silk lanterns below, just as Kraznys’s translator had promised. The brick pyramids were all glimmery with light. *But it is dark below, in the streets and plazas and fighting pits. And it is darkest of all in the barracks, where some little boy is feeding scraps to the puppy they gave him when they took away his manhood.*

There was a soft step behind her. “*Khaleesi*.” His voice. “Might I speak frankly?”

Dany did not turn. She could not bear to look at him just now. If she did, she might well slap him again. Or cry. Or kiss him. And never know which was right and which was wrong and which was madness. “Say what you will, ser.”

“When Aegon the Dragon stepped ashore in Westeros, the kings of Vale and Rock and Reach did not rush to hand him their crowns. If you mean to sit his Iron Throne, you must win it as he did, with steel and dragonfire. And that will mean blood on your hands before the thing is done.”

Blood and fire, thought Dany. The words of House Targaryen. She had known them all her life. “The blood of my enemies I will shed gladly. The blood of innocents is another matter. Eight thousand Unsullied they would offer me. Eight thousand dead babes. Eight thousand strangled dogs.”

“Your Grace,” said Jorah Mormont, “I saw King’s Landing after the Sack. Babes were butchered that day as well, and old men, and children at play. More women were raped than you can count. There is a savage beast in every man, and when you hand that man a sword or spear and send him forth to war, the beast stirs. The scent of blood is all it takes to wake him. Yet I have never heard of these Unsullied raping, nor putting a city to the sword, nor even plundering, save at the express command of those who lead them. Brick they may be, as you say, but if you buy them henceforth the only dogs they’ll kill are those *you* want dead. And you do have some dogs you want dead, as I recall.”

The Usurper’s dogs. “Yes.” Dany gazed off at the soft colored lights and let the cool salt breeze caress her. “You speak of sacking cities. Answer me this, ser—why have the Dothraki never sacked *this* city?” She pointed. “Look at the walls. You can see where they’ve begun to crumble. There, and there. Do you see any guards on those towers? I don’t. Are they hiding, ser? I saw these sons of the harpy today, all their proud highborn warriors. They dressed in linen skirts, and the fiercest thing about them was their hair. Even a modest *khalasar* could crack this Astapor like a nut and spill out the rotted meat inside. So tell me, why is that ugly harpy not sitting beside the godsway in Vaes Dothrak among the other stolen gods?”

“You have a dragon’s eye, *Khaleesi*, that’s plain to see.”

“I wanted an answer, not a compliment.”

“There are two reasons. Astapor’s brave defenders are so much chaff, it’s true. Old names and fat purses who dress up as Ghiscari scourges to pretend they still rule a vast empire. Every one is a high officer. On feastdays they fight mock wars in the pits to demonstrate what brilliant commanders they are, but it’s the eunuchs who do the dying. All the same, any enemy wanting to sack Astapor would have to know that they’d be facing Unsullied. The slavers would turn out the whole garrison in the city’s defense. The Dothraki have not ridden against Unsullied since they left their braids at the gates of Qohor.”

“And the second reason?” Dany asked.

“Who would attack Astapor?” Ser Jorah asked. “Meereen and Yunkai are rivals but not enemies, the Doom destroyed Valyria, the folk of the eastern

hinterlands are all Ghiscari, and beyond the hills lies Lhazar. The Lamb Men, as your Dothraki call them, a notably unwarlike people.”

“Yes,” she agreed, “but *north* of the slave cities is the Dothraki sea, and two dozen mighty *khals* who like nothing more than sacking cities and carrying off their people into slavery.”

“Carrying them off *where*? What good are slaves once you’ve killed the slavers? Valyria is no more, Qarth lies beyond the red waste, and the Nine Free Cities are thousands of leagues to the west. And you may be sure the sons of the harpy give lavishly to every passing *khal*, just as the magisters do in Pentos and Norvos and Myr. They know that if they feast the horselords and give them gifts, they will soon ride on. It’s cheaper than fighting, and a deal more certain.”

Cheaper than fighting, Dany thought. *Yes, it might be*. If only it could be that easy for her. How pleasant it would be to sail to King’s Landing with her dragons, and pay the boy Joffrey a chest of gold to make him go away.

“*Khaleesi*?” Ser Jorah prompted, when she had been silent for a long time. He touched her elbow lightly.

Dany shrugged him off. “Viserys would have bought as many Unsullied as he had the coin for. But you once said I was like Rhaegar . . .”

“I remember, Daenerys.”

“*Your Grace*,” she corrected. “Prince Rhaegar led free men into battle, not slaves. Whitebeard said he dubbed his squires himself, and made many other knights as well.”

“There was no higher honor than to receive your knighthood from the Prince of Dragonstone.”

“Tell me, then—when he touched a man on the shoulder with his sword, what did he say? ‘Go forth and kill the weak’? Or ‘Go forth and defend them’? At the Trident, those brave men Viserys spoke of who died beneath our dragon banners—did they give their lives because they *believed* in Rhaegar’s cause, or because they had been bought and paid for?” Dany turned to Mormont, crossed her arms, and waited for an answer.

“My queen,” the big man said slowly, “all you say is true. But Rhaegar lost on the Trident. He lost the battle, he lost the war, he lost the kingdom,

and he lost his life. His blood swirled downriver with the rubies from his breastplate, and Robert the Usurper rode over his corpse to steal the Iron Throne. Rhaegar fought valiantly, Rhaegar fought nobly, Rhaegar fought honorably. And Rhaegar *died*.”