

bite.” He gave the big black wolf an angry glance out of the corner of his eye. “Take a lesson, Bran. The man who trusts in spells is dueling with a glass sword. As the children did. Here, let me show you something.” He stood abruptly, crossed the room, and returned with a green jar in his good hand. “Have a look at these,” he said as he pulled the stopper and shook out a handful of shiny black arrowheads.

Bran picked one up. “It’s made of glass.” Curious, Rickon drifted closer to peer over the table. “Dragonglass,” Osha named it as she sat down beside Luwin, bandagings in hand.

“Obsidian,” Maester Luwin insisted, holding out his wounded arm. “Forged in the fires of the gods, far below the earth. The children of the forest hunted with that, thousands of years ago. The children worked no metal. In place of mail, they wore long shirts of woven leaves and bound their legs in bark, so they seemed to melt into the wood. In place of swords, they carried blades of obsidian.”

“And still do.” Osha placed soft pads over the bites on the maester’s forearm and bound them tight with long strips of linen.

Bran held the arrowhead up close. The black glass was slick and shiny. He thought it beautiful. “Can I keep one?”

“As you wish,” the maester said.

“I want one too,” Rickon said. “I want four. I’m four.”

Luwin made him count them out. “Careful, they’re still sharp. Don’t cut yourself.”

“Tell me about the children,” Bran said. It was important.

“What do you wish to know?”

“Everything.”

Maester Luwin tugged at his chain collar where it chafed against his neck. “They were people of the Dawn Age, the very first, before kings and kingdoms,” he said. “In those days, there were no castles or holdfasts, no cities, not so much as a market town to be found between here and the sea of Dorne. There were no men at all. Only the children of the forest dwelt in the lands we now call the Seven Kingdoms.

“They were a people dark and beautiful, small of stature, no taller than children even when grown to manhood. They lived in the depths of the wood, in caves and crannogs and secret tree towns. Slight as they were, the children were quick and graceful. Male and female hunted together, with weirwood bows and flying snares. Their gods were the gods of the forest, stream, and stone, the old gods whose names are secret. Their wise men were called greenseers, and carved strange faces in the weirwoods to keep watch on the woods. How long the children reigned here or where they came from, no man can know.

“But some twelve thousand years ago, the First Men appeared from the east, crossing the Broken Arm of Dorne before it was broken. They came with bronze swords and great leathern shields, riding horses. No horse had ever been seen on this side of the narrow sea. No doubt the children were as frightened by the horses as the First Men were by the faces in the trees. As the First Men carved out holdfasts and farms, they cut down the faces and gave them to the fire. Horrorstruck, the children went to war. The old songs say that the greenseers used dark magics to