

“I am khaleesi, and I say it is not forbidden. In Vaes Dothrak, Khal Drogo slew a stallion and I ate his heart, to give our son strength and courage. This is the same. The same.”

The stallion kicked and reared as Rakharo, Quaro, and Aggo pulled him close to the tub where the khal floated like one already dead, pus and blood seeping from his wound to stain the bathwaters. Mirri Maz Duur chanted words in a tongue that Dany did not know, and a knife appeared in her hand. Dany never saw where it came from. It looked old; hammered red bronze, leaf-shaped, its blade covered with ancient glyphs. The maegi drew it across the stallion’s throat, under the noble head, and the horse screamed and shuddered as the blood poured out of him in a red rush. He would have collapsed, but the men of her khas held him up. “Strength of the mount, go into the rider,” Mirri sang as horse blood swirled into the waters of Drogo’s bath. “Strength of the beast, go into the man.”

Jhogo looked terrified as he struggled with the stallion’s weight, afraid to touch the dead flesh, yet afraid to let go as well. Only a horse, Dany thought. If she could buy Drogo’s life with the death of a horse, she would pay a thousand times over.

When they let the stallion fall, the bath was a dark red, and nothing showed of Drogo but his face. Mirri Maz Duur had no use for the carcass. “Burn it,” Dany told them. It was what they did, she knew. When a man died, his mount was killed and placed beneath him on the funeral pyre, to carry him to the night lands. The men of her khas dragged the carcass from the tent. The blood had gone everywhere. Even the sandsilk walls were spotted with red, and the rugs underfoot were black and wet.

Braziers were lit. Mirri Maz Duur tossed a red powder onto the coals. It gave the smoke a spicy scent, a pleasant enough smell, yet Eroeh fled sobbing, and Dany was filled with fear. But she had gone too far to turn back now. She sent her handmaids away. “Go with them, Silver Lady,” Mirri Maz Duur told her.

“I will stay,” Dany said. “The man took me under the stars and gave life to the child inside me. I will not leave him.”

“You must. Once I begin to sing, no one must enter this tent. My song will wake powers old and dark. The dead will dance here this night. No living man must look on them.”

Dany bowed her head, helpless. “No one will enter.” She bent over the tub, over Drogo in his bath of blood, and kissed him lightly on the brow. “Bring him back to me,” she whispered to Mirri Maz Duur before she fled.

Outside, the sun was low on the horizon, the sky a bruised red. The khalasar had made camp. Tents and sleeping mats were scattered as far as the eye could see. A hot wind blew. Jhogo and Aggo were digging a firepit to burn the dead stallion. A crowd had gathered to stare at Dany with hard black eyes, their faces like masks of beaten copper. She saw Ser Jorah Mormont, wearing mail and leather now, sweat beading on his broad, balding forehead. He pushed his way through the Dothraki to Dany’s side. When he saw the scarlet footprints her boots had left on the ground, the color seemed to drain from his face. “What have you done, you little fool?” he asked hoarsely.

“I had to save him.”