The Dragon Awakes Part II

by Wardown

Summary

The first chapter is set in AC 312. The events of Part I took place in AC 305/306 AC. I have used the Show's dating rather than the books' dating, which ages up the characters slightly. Daenerys and Jon would therefore be 30, Sansa 27, Arya 24, at the time of the first chapter.

In the books, Meereen is 3,000 miles from Kings Landing as the crow flies, and Volantis 1,500 miles, and much further than that for a ship to sail. The show seems to place Meereen and Volantis closer to Kings Landing than that. I have therefore assumed that Volantis is about the same distance from Kings Landing as Palermo is from London, and that Meereen is about the same distance as Alexandria.

Talisa Maegyr never left Volantis, in this fic.

As with Part I, this is Dark Daenerys and Dark Sansa. My literary inspiration for Daenerys is Lucius Cornelius Sulla, from Colleen McCullogh's Masters of Rome series. For Sansa, it is Styliane Daleina, from the Sarantine Mosaic duology, by Guy Gavriel Kay.
Kinvara Saves a Life

Chapter Summary

24th March, AC 312, Volantis

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There’s only one thing worse than living in a city under siege. The moment it falls.

Talisa Maegyr senses that the city has fallen, even before she knows it. One can tell. In the distance, she can hear roars of triumph from the attackers, cries of dismay from the defenders. She knows what’s coming as well. Surrender to the Dragon Queen on terms, and you can rely on her soldiers to behave in a civilised fashion. Force them to storm the city, as her stupid relatives have insisted on doing, and things will go less well. Everyone has heard what happened at Mantarys when that city was foolish enough to fight to the bitter end. What to do? Stay indoors with her children, and hope that the conquerors’ bloodlust will have run its course, by the time they reach her? No chance of that. She lives far too close to the city walls. In any case, the attackers will be burning just as much as they plunder. Dying in a fire is about as bad a death as she can think of.

In her imagination, she can see the soldiers pouring through the breach, sweeping the last defenders away. She imagines she can hear screams, as the soldiers reach the first houses. She is no enemy of the Queen, but the victorious soldiers won’t know this. Pretending a calmness she doesn’t feel, she leaves her bedroom, after pocketing her jewellery, calling for her maid, and her two sons, telling them to meet her in the hall. The boys are 12 and 13, the maid only a few years older. They are slow, agonisingly slow, to get dressed. All of them are white-faced and tense. Her sons grab a few prized possessions, a knife, a toy. They step out into the road. Already, people are out in the street, panicking, unsure where to run to. Some are cursing, others praying, others weeping. All equally useless. However, she knows where she is going. “The Red Temple”, she hisses to her family. “Run”.

They run hard, down flagged streets. This is one of the better areas of the city, clean, well-lit, and free from robbers and looters; even in a situation like this, there are scum who would take advantage of their fellow citizens. There are people running with her, but it’s far less crowded than in the slums. Behind her, she can feel a rising wind. She can hear sounds that she would rather not hear; shouts and cries, the roar of flames, and the shattering of broken class. She can smell the smoke, and already, embers are drifting past her. One snags in her hair, and she screams as she beats at it. She looks round once, and sees buildings catching fire a couple of hundred yards back, an orange glow in the darkness. She dodges a riderless horse that races out of a side street in front of them, cursing it in language she has never used before. “Faster”, she screams.

She feels the wind of the Queen’s dragon flying overhead, a dark shadow in the night. She braces herself for the withering fire which must follow, but fortunately, the Queen has other targets in mind. Perhaps the Queen is making for the Black Walls, where her relatives have taken shelter. She doubts if that will save them.

They turn a corner into the square where the Red Temple stands. Thank the Lord of Light that they converted! It infuriated her noble brother, who thought she was adopting the religion of the slaves,
and who expelled her from his family’s palace, but it may just save the lives of her and her children. The temple is built of black stone, and set well away from the other buildings. They should be safe from the burning, at least. She recognises other worshippers crowding the gates to the Temple compound, and joins them. The Temple guards are present, armed with long spears, looking closely at the people begging to enter. One recognises her, and beckons them through.

Inside, the Temple is crowded. Men, women and children look equally scared, many of them crying. The Priestess, Kinvara, alone remains calm, tending the sacred fire. The Red clergy preach unswerving obedience to the Dragon Queen. She is their Saviour, Azhor Ahai Reborn. She saved the world from the Great Other, and now she is come to purge it of the followers of Druj, the Lie. When the Triararchs executed the Queen’s envoys, Kinvara and the other priests denounced them as sinful. Many followers of R’hllor now serve in the Queen’s armies. They are all the Queen’s supporters. Surely, they will be safe here. The pagans will have to take their chances, elsewhere.

Long, tense, minutes pass, until she hears a commotion outside. Plainly the Queen’s soldiers have arrived. She sees Kinvara go to the entrance, with her acolytes. “Do not resist,” she tells the guards, “We are on their side.” Figures enter the Temple. The Unsullied. They have a fearsome reputation, but at least they are reputed to be well-disciplined. Scores of them form up in close ranks, crowding the worshippers backwards. Talisa remains in the front rank of the congregation, holding her sons’ hands, keeping an eye on her maid. Kinvara remains calm, awaiting their commander.

Eventually, he arrives, a man in his early thirties with a smooth brown face and close-cropped hair, lean and muscular. His men salute him, but he in turn waits for another. The woman who enters is every bit as beautiful as Talisa has heard, with hair of silver-gilt, and vivid purple eyes, immaculate in a suit of black mail, inlaid with the rubies of House Targaryen. The commander of the Unsullied salutes her in turn, and Kinvara comes forward, and kneels.

“Your Grace, allow us to be the first to congratulate you. We have prayed for your victory over the unbelievers. We rejoice to see House Targaryen bring Volantis to the path of righteousness; punish the Triararchs and their followers as they merit, purge our city of the pagans.” She speaks in the Valyrian dialect of Volantis.

The other woman gives her a cold, hard stare. Then she replies in the same language “Tell me what you have done to aid my army, during this siege”.

“We have prayed for Your Grace and for your success in battle ” replies Kinvara smoothly.

“Have you indeed? But, did you provide my soldiers with intelligence? Did you rise against the Triararchs? Did you flee the city, and offer to assist my troops? Did you provide us with food, money, supplies? That is what I would call aid.”

For the first time, Kinvara’s composure wavers. But, she answers “Your Grace, the Triararchs held the city fast. We would have helped you in such ways, but we could not. We are guiltless.”

The woman frowns “How do I know that the guilty are not seeking shelter among you?”

“No pagan would dare to take refuge among us.”

The commander of the Unsullied approaches the lady, and bows. “Your Grace, allow me to give my views.” The pair of them drift away. It’s clear that they’re arguing heatedly, but Talisa can’t hear them. The woman returns to the front, and stares at them for while, while chewing her lower lip. Talisa suddenly feels sick, knowing what is about to happen.

The Queen speaks “Loyalty should be rewarded. Your lives are not forfeit.” She turns to Kinvara and says “Priestess, you are responsible for the behaviour of your people from now on. Grey
Worm” she commands, “give sanctuary to all those who are sheltered by the Red Priests.”

Talisa finds that she has wet herself with relief.

Chapter End Notes

The religion of R'hllor is based upon classical Zoroastrianism. which held that its followers must constantly strive against followers of Druj, The Lie.
Daenerys is sitting on a field chair, in the shade of her scarlet tent, looking out on the Black Walls of Volantis, beyond her siege lines. Her siege engines keep up a constant rain of missiles on the walls. When the rest of the city fell, the Old Blood sill, amazingly, rejected her demand for a surrender. Their behaviour in recent years has been suicidal. Firstly, they funded the Yunkish and the remnants of the Sons of the Harpy to launch an uprising against Daario Naharis in Meereen, while she was in the West. Daario had mostly put down the rebellion when she returned, and brought fire and blood to Yunkai. Then, when she had sent envoys to Volantis, demanding that the instigators of the revolt be handed over to her for judgment, they had executed them. Volantis is a thousand miles from Meereen, and difficult to reach. She had taken two years to prepare an invasion by land and sea. Her armies had taken Mantarys, which had been foolish enough to refuse to surrender, and had left the city in flames; and Qohor, which had been sensible enough to submit. The Qohorics were still alive, therefore. Then they marched on Volantis, reducing its tributary cities in turn. Her fleet had taken the Volantene coastland, before blockading the city. Still, the Triararchs fought on, hopelessly.

She currently has one of the three Triararchs in her custody. He sits trussed, on the ground in front of her. She is keen for him to watch the destruction of his world. She also intends to make a demonstration to the defenders. She learned that the Volantenes had put a price of ten thousand gold Honours on her head. Currently, ten thousand gold Honours are being melted in a travelling forge, on a cart, outside her tent. The smell of burning charcoal and molten metal fills the air. The Triararch repeatedly looks nervously towards the forge and to her. Kinvara approaches and speaks:

"Your Grace. Is it time to take down this tent, and to erect the black one?"

She considers the matter. The Scarlet Tent indicates that when the Black Walls are breached, every male above the age of 12 will be executed. The Black Tent is a sign that every living creature will be destroyed.

"No. Many of my soldiers are without wives. The widows of this city will need husbands in due course."

Kinvara bows and smiles

"The Lord of Light will welcome the sacrifice that you send to him when you take the city.."

Daenerys rises and approaches the forge. The air shimmers and twists above it in the heat. It is time. She walks out through her siege lines, stopping just beyond arrow shot from the Walls, but well within view of the defenders. A stake has been rammed into the ground at that spot. Dothraki push the cart forward. Grey Worm prods the Triararch to his feet with his sword and sets him walking behind her. She turns to the Triararch and speaks:
"You offered ten thousand gold Honours for my head. It is past time that I repaid my debt to you."

Grey Worm chains the moaning wretch to the stake. The man babbles for mercy. Grey Worm casually strikes him across the face, to silence him. The man understands now what is coming, as one of the Dothraki, wearing horsehair gloves, thrusts a metal funnel into his mouth, breaking his front teeth. Another Dothraki opens the door to the forge, collecting the liquid metal in a heavy iron crucible. Carefully, very carefully, he carries the crucible in a large pair of tongs towards the doomed man, and then, slowly tips it into the funnel, still held firm by the other. The sound that the man makes is like nothing human, as the scalding metal cascades down his throat.

"What? Do you still give me no thanks for settling my debt?" cries Daenerys, as the Dothraki continues pouring the metal. The man screams no longer, but makes a ghastly rasping noise, as his vocal chords have been burned away; he is still very much alive, however, writhing in his chains. Daenerys makes a vulgar gesture at the defenders, before turning and walking back. She turns to Grey Worm and says "When he's dead, open him up and recover the gold."

The moment of the final assault is fast approaching. Daenerys's engineers have confirmed that after a fortieth's continuous bombardment, cracks are starting to appear in the Walls. She sits down again, in the tent, and watches the bombardment with interest, over the course of several hours. Quite suddenly, one of the towers in the wall begins to totter, and then slowly falls outwards, spilling its defenders on to the ground. The attackers now direct the fire from the siege engines onto the walls on either side of the fallen tower, steadily widening the breach.

It is time. She commands Grey Worm and Daario Naharis to begin the assault. Even though the Black Walls are beginning to crumble, she knows that the assault will take a dreadful toll on the attackers. Fortunately, she can minimise that toll. The Unsullied use their spears and whips to drive thousands of prisoners before them. They will soak up the defenders' fire. They moan and scream as they are driven forward, into the storm of arrows and bolts that awaits them. There is worse to come. Jets of liquid fire gush from syphons, cunningly positioned on the Walls, reducing men to screaming charcoal within seconds. The Queen feels no pity. They had repeated chances to submit, and they refused them. The Dragon does not concern itself with the fate of the sheep

Behind the prisoners, her own forces creep forward, many of them protected by moving shelters, covered with animal skins, soaked in water. The enemy are still taking a toll, even on them. The time has come to unleash dragon fire on the defenders. She mounts Drogon, and fastens the chains to secure herself. Then she takes off. She flies out towards the Sea, where there is no danger, gradually gaining altitude, until she is ready to turn back towards the city. Hundreds of feet up, she sees the whole city laid out beneath her, like a model. She flies over the Black Walls, out of danger she believes. And, that is where she is wrong. A stray bolt lodges in her shoulder, agonisingly painful. But, that is good. The pain is simply fuel, piled onto the flames of her anger, driving them ever higher. She pulls out the bolt, tossing it away. Her anger grows, washing out over her, over the city. The defenders do not know what it is to wake the dragon. They are about to learn.

She sees the defenders below her, running hither and yon, pointing upwards at her, feeble, pathetic, and she laughs. That is the terrible beauty, the awful justice, of being a dragon. Young and old, rich and poor, men and women and children, they are all prey to her. There can be no exceptions. The dragon hates all living things. But her oldest-buried, deepest-rooted, and hottest-burning hatred, that is for the Volantenes. She will reduce them to ash, their city to cinders, and plough the remains with salt. Now, is the beautiful moment. Headless of darts, bolts, and arrows, she dives at a steep angle for the Black Walls, Drogon strafing the defenders with fire, and then racing along the length of the Wall, reducing them to ash, or ripping them with his claws. She laughs as she sees them leaping to their deaths from the Wall, so desperate are they to avoid the dragon. She ascends again, and circles the Walls, amused at their pathetic efforts to shoot her
down. Again, she descends sharply, aiming this time for the main thoroughfare of the inner city, Canopic Way. Civilians run screaming along the avenue, as she floats above it, little more than roof height, bathing the street in flame. Systematically, methodically, she flies from street to street, reducing palaces, temples, guildhalls to molten slag in succession. But one target remains. The Hippodrome.

She sees it half a mile away. This is where her enemies will have gathered, in the hope, perhaps, of arranging a surrender, even at this late stage. She laughs. As easy to stop the incoming tide as to escape the Dragon's Justice. She flies over the Hippodrome, seeing hundreds of people below there. She hovers over them, laughing at their cries and screams, their wretched attempts to escape her. And then, she dives, withering the building in flame, melting it, along with those who have taken refuge there. A single blow of Drogon's tail sends tons of stone falling from the highest tiers, hurtling down on to the animals who cower below. Again and again, Drogon lashes them with his flames.

She flies away from the ruins that were the Hippodrome. She can see that her men have breached the Black Walls in half a dozen places. The city is dying, and still she kills it. She has forgotten her earlier orders. She will not stop now, until every last creature within the Black Walls has been reduced to dust.

Unless she herself is struck. A bolt from a ballista suddenly strikes her thigh, snapping it like a twig, and severing the chains that bind her to the dragon. She feels no pain as she falls, only astonishment. She is vulnerable, after all, like any other human being. She smashes backwards into the branches of a large tree, and knows no more.

Chapter End Notes

1. Daenerys becomes the love child of Genghis Khan and the Bloody Nine, during this chapter. Her behaviour is indefensible, by any measure. I wanted to show the joy she takes in killing (something which is also shown in the chapter of A Storm of Swords, in which she takes Astapor, albeit, with far greater justification).

2. The use of Red Tent/Black Tent, and driving prisoners before her men, to soak up the fire, is taken from the practice of the Mongols.

3. The execution of the Triararch has obvious similarities to the death of Viserys, but is actually based on the execution of Manius Aquilius, a notoriously corrupt governor of Asia Province, by Mithradates Eupator

4. The Old Blood are the elite of Volantis. They live behind the Black Walls, the innermost defensive line of the city. The Gold Honour is the currency of Volantis, and is about the size of a British penny.
Jon awaits the Braavosi Ambassador in the Small Council Chamber of the Red Keep. The palace, like much of Kings Landing, remains a building site, but it is now fit accommodation for the Regent of the Seven Kingdoms. He moved here from Dragonstone two years previously, a couple of years after the Queen departed for the East. Ruling the Seven Kingdoms has not been easy. As the old saying goes *Troubles come not as single spies, but in battalions*

*With him, are his Master of Ships, Ser Davos Seaworth, recently appointed in place of the late Lord Velaryon, and his Mistress of Whisperers, his sister Arya Stark. He anticipates a difficult meeting.*

The first of his troubles, Cithrin Bel Sarcour enters the room, and curtseys saying, "Your Grace, my Lord and Lady, to what do I owe the pleasure of this summons."

"Alas, Madame" Jon replies "I do not have pleasant news for your Excellency. It is my unfortunate duty to inform you that you are now persona non grata within the Seven Kingdoms."

"That is sad news indeed, your Grace. May one know why?"

"You are aware, your Excellency, that your country's warships have made repeated incursions into our coastal waters; we have frequently complained to you of the same. But there is worse. Recently, our merchant ships and those of our Tyroshi allies have come under attack from pirates based in the Stepstones. We have reliable intelligence that those pirates operate under Braavosi protection."

"That is a most serious allegation, your Grace. The Stepstones have ever been a nest of piracy. My government concurs that pirates are the enemies of all mankind. What evidence have you that my government has been affording them protection?"

Arya steps forward. "The evidence is contained in this dossier, your Excellency. It is most detailed, I assure you. The pirate ships which we have identified are registered either in Braavos itself, or in towns along the Braavosi coast. The vessels themselves are financed or insured by the Iron Bank." She hands the ambassador a thick folder.

"I shall study this with interest, but even if this were true, the Iron Bank, for which I had the honour of working for several years, is not the Braavosi government"

"Bollocks to that!" exclaims Ser Davos. "Your government has its head up the Iron Bank's backside!"

"Not quite how I would have put it your Excellency" Jon interjects "but Ser Davos has grasped the essence of the situation."
"Might I inquire whether you are implying that a state of war exists between our two countries, your Grace."

"No, but I am closing all ports in the Seven Kingdoms to Braavosi shipping, for the time being."

"I cannot speak for my government at this point, but I would anticipate that they will adopt similar measures, unless.........Your Grace, I believe it would be possible to resolve this unpleasantness to the benefit of both our nations. It is still a bone of contention that neither the Iron Bank nor their clients have been compensated for the losses which they suffered during the late war. If Your Grace were prepared to agree in principle, that this compensation should be paid, then I have little doubt that the Council of Six would look kindly on your requests. As to the amount, I am sure that the Iron Bank would be happy for you to refer the case to arbitration, and would accept the outcome."

"I will not make payments to the Iron Bank, simply in order to ensure that your country acts as a civilised country should. As to the principle, the Iron Bank supported the Queen's enemies during that war. The Iron Bank must be prepared to accept that their actions have consequences. Until the Iron Bank ceases to make this demand, the Iron Bank will not operate in this Realm."

"Then I fear we are at an impasse. I shall take my leave. Your Grace, I wish you health and prosperity, and trust that we shall meet again in happier circumstances."

"Your Excellency, health and great joy."

"What a snake!" sneers Arya, after the ambassador has left, accompanied by Ser Davos. "As if she isn't working hand in glove with the pirates. She virtually admitted that they're working for her government. She should be hanged from the castle gate."

"Agreed", sighs Jon, "but then, we really would be at war with the Republic. I wouldn't want to bet on the outcome of that"

"The Queen has arrived today. She has Drogon and a fleet. Are they really going to risk becoming another Volantis?"

Jon replies "By all accounts, the Queen is not the woman she was. "The second of my troubles"

"I've more bad news"

"Go on, tell me."

"I believe our sister is a traitor."The third trouble"

"I wish I could say I was surprised by that. I've read your reports. Since her marriage to Lord Arryn, they've mustered over twelve thousand sellswords at Gulltown and other ports in the Vale. To fight the mountain-clans? I think not."

"I blame myself for not acting sooner. Years ago, just before the Queen's coronation, she made it clear to me just how furious she was that she is not Queen in her own right. I thought it was just wild talk. It isn't. I don't think she's ready to raise her banners just yet, but she will be soon. When I last visited the Eyrie, a year and a half ago, she couldn't have been sweeter, but it was all an act, I realise that now. I told her not to make me choose between her and you."

"You don't have to. I can release you from my service if you wish."

"No, I've made my choice. I hate to say it Jon, but perhaps, the time has come to consider
"Arya" replies Jon earnestly. "I loved our father. I didn't love Lady Catelyn, and she certainly didn't love me. But, I acknowledge, she was a virtuous, and noble-hearted lady. Imagine if they were here now, and they could hear us discussing...options. No, let's be frank. Discussing killing our own sister, and our brother too. Sansa's left Bran in charge at Winterfell. If we kill her, we have to kill him too. We didn't need the Lannisters and Freys and Boltons to destroy our family. We're doing it ourselves. No, Arya, banish that thought from your mind. I am recruiting steadily for my army, the Queen will bring soldiers of our own, we can rely on the Stormlands, Dorne, the Reach and Yara Greyjoy, if it has to come to war, but I want peace above all, if possible!"

A loud trumpeting and screeching is heard from the Courtyard. "Drogon, let's go."

Jon and Arya exit the building. A detachment of Jon's soldiers have formed up as an honour guard to receive the Queen. The dragon is already feasting on the carcasses of sheep that have been prepared for him. Hundreds of Unsullied march through the entrance to the Red Keep, filing outwards, to make way for a litter being borne in their midst.

A litter. Not good at all

Grey Worm emerges from the Unsullied, salutes Jon, and then salutes the litter, crying "All hail to the Mother of All!" The Unsullied start drumming their spears against the ground. The litter is lowered to the ground, and the Queen's handmaid, Nouronohar draws the curtains and steps out, turning to extend a hand to Her Grace. Jon grits his teeth, to avoid expressing shock at the sight of his aunt, who emerges unsteadily. Her hair is now quite grey, cut short; her face is etched with deep lines, her body is shrunken, clad in black leather armour and with Aegon's crown on her brow. She almost looks like an old woman. Only her purple eyes are unchanged, keen and bright as ever. Jon can see from the look on her face that every step is an agony for her, as they walk to each other and embrace. She kisses Arya lightly on the lips.

"How bad was it Dany?"

"What do you think? The healers told me that I was unconscious for over a week. My skull was fractured, my left leg broken in two places, my left shoulder and spine were badly damaged, and several ribs were broken. I was on my back for weeks. I suppose it's a miracle that I can move at all."

"Nasty."

"That doesn't begin to describe it. Most of the time, I was out of my mind on wine and poppy smoke, for the pain. More than once, I told Grey Worm to make an end of me, quickly."

"Just as well he disobeyed orders, then."

"I'm better off than the Volantenes at any rate. My soldiers despaired of my life. They slaughtered every living thing in the city, other than the followers of the Red Priests. The Red Priests even built a huge bonfire into which they hurled hundreds of "unbelievers", so that their God would heal me. I don't know whether he answered their prayers or not - but I'm alive, just about." She gives an amused snort, which makes Jon's skin crawl. "The healers insist I must walk a little, each day. It's
agony, but I can't lose the use of my legs. It will be a long time before I can ride Drogon again. Perhaps, never."

"You've done well, Jon, as Regent, so far as I can tell. I've been thinking hard about our family's future. There's no way that one person can rule Meereen, Qohor, Volantis, and the Seven Kingdoms. I'm going to make you King in your own right. You and I will rule the Seven Kingdoms jointly, while I'm here. You can see the state I'm in. When I leave for the East again, I doubt if I'll be coming back. Then, you'll be King on your own. One day, you'll get to decide what to do with the Eastern states. Appoint rulers of your own, or let them go their own way. "

Jon's heart leaps. That is a huge sign of trust and confidence! "I'm honoured."

"Don't think I'm doing you a favour, I'm not. By the way, how is your marriage?"

"Good. Mariah has given me a son, and has another child on the way. "

"Excellent. You'll need an heir and a spare, at the very least. "

"I've arranged dinner for us all, this evening. Before that, there are matters which I must discuss, with you."

"Let me guess. One is Braavos, the other is your dear sister in the North. Arya has been keeping me abreast of events on this side of the Narrow Sea. Yes, we'll talk, but just now, I must rest for a while. "

"Of course. I've prepared chambers for you on the ground floor."

"No need. I'll just rest here for the time being. Give me a couple of hours, and then wake me up."

Jon rises. Despite everything, he realises he is as much in love with her as he has ever been. She's a monster, but it doesn't matter.

Chapter End Notes

"Troubles come not as single spies, but in battalions" is adapted from a similar comment by Claudius in Hamlet Act IV, Scene 5.
Daenerys joins Jon, his wife Mariah, and Arya in a small, beautifully-appointed dining room, overlooking the Blackwater. Also with them, is Jon and Mariah's son Prince Aegon who is now four years old. He has long wanted to meet his famous aunt, and rushes towards her as she enters the room, clapping her legs, and nearly knocking her over.

"Careful, young man, I'm delicate" she chides. Jon pulls him away.

They all sit down, as servants swiftly bring a selection of hot and cold soups, with dry white wine to accompany them. The Queen settles for a cold Dornish soup of tomatoes, cucumber and garlic. It tastes delicious. Unusually she has a second bowl. For a time, the say little as the eat, but the boy can't keep silent for long, "Mummy says they call you a name. Is it true?"

She smiles at Mariah, a dark-haired, olive-skinned woman, with the good looks typical of the Martells. "I'm sure they call me lots of names."

"But this is a good one to have. She says they call you "The White Flame Who Dances on the Graves of Her Enemies."

"Really Aegon, remember your manners", his mother rebukes him.

The Queen laughs. "Well, that's certainly one of my nicknames". Better than Queen of the Ashes, Foreign Whore, or Abomination Born of Incest

"I don't think your mother would be very happy if I told you some of the others." She changes the subject "Arya, you're twenty five now, shouldn't you think of getting married?" she enquires.

"I've always said. It's not me. My work takes up all my time. But, one day, I'll do something else. I want to see what lies beyond Fair Isle?"

"Do you think there is anything?"

"There must be. Sometimes, you get tree trunks, washed up in the Iron Islands, that have drifted East. They're bleached white, so they must have been in the Sea for years. They have to come from somewhere."

"My people aren't sailors", Mariah interjects. "But, I always remember the stories of Elissa Farman, who sailed away and was never seen again. I wonder, if she ever found a new world, and decided to live there. "

"The Sea Snake found one of her ships docked in Asshai, years later. It was falling apart, but he recognised the name" ,says Jon. "But, how it got there, nobody knows."

"She must have sailed all the way round the world then", says the Queen.

"What do you mean, auntie?" asks the boy.

"The world's round, Aegon. If you keep moving in one direction, for long enough, eventually you'll end up in the same place. Don't worry, I didn't understand it either, when I was a little girl, but your
Maesters will explain it to you when you're older."

The servants clear the table, and bring the next course, poussins and small game birds, cunningly seasoned, along with a fruity red.

"I can't remember when I've eaten so well" comments the Queen. "I didn't exactly live on hard tack when I was campaigning, or on board ship, but the food got monotonous at times. I hope I never have to look at another sweet beetroot, as long as I live. They serve them with everything in the East." She turns to speak to the Princess:

"So, Mariah, when is the baby due."

"Five months, your Grace."

"Daenerys, please. Was your last an easy delivery?"

"Extremely."

"That's good. Sadly, Jon and I never knew our parents. Every one of them was a victim of the Usurper."

"Well, his family was destroyed in the end."

"They destroyed each other. Though, I suppose Gendry Baratheon did well for himself."

"His father never even acknowledged him" comments Jon. "He really was a worthless man."

"There's Mya Stone in the Vale as well" says Arya. "He probably left bastards all over the place."

My apologies, Mariah, I shouldn't say that in front of your young son."

"It's not a source of embarrassment in Dorne, Arya. We cherish natural children, just as much as we do those who are born within marriage."

"Will you tell me a story, auntie?" asks the boy. "You must have been in lots of battles.". Somehow, I don't think your mother would like it if I told you what went down at Volantis."

"I have. But, I'll tell you something different. I loved this tale when I was a girl, and I think you'll enjoy it."

The are interrupted by the next course. Rare cuts of venison and kid, garnished with greens, and pork, with pineapple and apricots. Flagons of full-bodied red wine are left on the table. After eating their fill, Daenerys resumes:

"Very well, Aegon. Once upon a time there was a King called Menelaos. He had a very beautiful wife called Helen, who he loved very much. But, there was a Prince who lived across the Sea who came to visit them. His name was Paris. They hunted and feasted together, and the King thought he and the Prince were good friends. But, secretly, Paris and Queen Helen had fallen in love with each other, and then one day, they ran away together, and sailed across the Sea to the Prince's country, and the Prince's father welcomed them. They all lived in a palace in a city called Ilion. King Menelaos was very angry, and he spoke to the kings who were his neighbours. And, they decided they would sail to Ilion and take Queen Helen back. They built a thousand ships, and then they set sail. And, then, they came to Ilion. The King told Paris and his people that he wanted his wife back, but they just shot arrows at him. "
"Did they kill him?"

"No, but they made him very angry. So for ten years, Menelaos and the other Kings besieged Ilion. But, they couldn't capture it, because it had very strong walls, and the defenders were very brave. And the city was so big, that they could grow crops in it, so they didn't run out of food. But, they did capture it finally. How do you think they did it?"

"I don't know"

King Menelaos had a very cunning friend, a man called Odysseus. He was even cleverer than a fox, and as you know, a fox is very clever. And he came up with a plan. They pretended to sail away, but they'd only sailed a few miles up the coast. And they built a huge wooden horse, which they left behind, and they said they were offering it to the gods. So, the people of Ilion thought they would take it inside the city. They would offer it to the gods, and win their favour. But, what they didn't know was the Menelaos, and Odysseuss, and some of their soldiers were hiding inside it. And, when night came they crept out of it, and killed the guards to the city gate. And then, they opened the gate, And, the rest of their soldiers had secretly sailed back during the night, and they captured the city. And, they cut the heads off Paris and his father."

"That's a little bit gruesome" says Mariah, but Aegon seems unworried.

"So what happened to Queen Helen, did they chop her head off as well?"

"No. She went home with King Menelaos and they lived happily ever after."

"But, she ran away from him."

"I know, but he was in love with her. When you're in love with someone, it doesn't matter what they do, you still forgive them. " There is a slightly awkward silence. That was tactless

Fortunately, the servants arrive with the final course. Fruits and sweetmeats, served with a sweet pudding wine, and hippocras. The meal concludes as the Sun sinks below the horizon. Daenerys bids the others good night, and Jon walks with her to her chambers. They enter her solar.

"My son adores you. Ever since he heard of you, you've been his heroine."

"I hope he won't be too broken-hearted when he finds out the truth about me."

"You did only what you had to do."

"Jon, I think you and I can be honest with each other, at least in private. Lying on my back for weeks on end, I had plenty of opportunity to think back on my life. I'm not the monster that people say I am. I'm worse. I killed my mother to come into this world, and I never stopped killing after that."

"I don't care. " Jon fastens his mouth on hers, and they kiss passionately. Then, she gently disengages.

"I wasn't faithful to you in the East."

"Daario?"

"And others. But, it's not that. There are no secrets in a castle. It's not your wife that concerns me, she's a Martell after all, and they're hardly noted for their chastity. No, it's your son. One day, he'll find out what I really am, but I hope he never loses faith in his father. Don't destroy his faith in
"Goodnight then". Jon leaves the room.

The Queen does have another love. A deep and enduring bond which was forged as she lay in agony in her sickbed. She removes a piece of poppy resin from a wooden box on her table, and places it in a bowl above a small lamp, to which she connects her pipe. She lights the lamp, inhales the delicious black smoke, and drifts far far away.

Chapter End Notes

1. I enjoy the food porn in George Martin's novels, so I decided to include some of my own. The wines would be the Westerosi equivalents of Chablis, Beaujolais, St. Emilion, Sauternes, and a mulled wine.

2. The original White Flame is Emhyr var Emries, Imperator of Nilfgard, in the Witcher series by Andrej Sapkowski.

3. Elissa Farman was the daughter of the Lord of Fair Isle, the Westernmost of the Iron Islands. She was the lover of Queen Rhaena Targaryen, who married her brother to provide cover for their relationship. The relationship ended badly, when Elissa left to explore the world, stealing three dragon eggs to finance the expedition. She vanished after sailing West, but her ship was discovered years later in Asshai by Lord Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake. The implication is that she circumnavigated the world, dying somewhere in the Far East.
Sweetrobin Makes A Friend

Chapter Summary

24th June AC 313

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He is trapped in the leather sack, with two maddened animals. The cockerel pecks viciously at this face. The dog worries his genitals. Desperately he tries to fend them off, even as water starts seeping into the darkness. The animals shit on him repeatedly, both of them as panicked as he is. All he can do now is wait to drown or suffocate in the darkness. He screams, again and again, but there is no one to hear him.

Tyrion wakes, bathed in sweat. The same dream comes frequently, perhaps three or four times a year. He can never forget the terror he experienced at Dragonstone; the sheer humiliation of soiling himself in front of the bitch Queen and her repulsive heir; the pain inflicted on him by the teenage monster who now serves the Queen as Mistress of Whisperers. Nor can he forget that this dreadful fate awaits him, should he ever set foot again in the Seven Kingdoms. And, he is about to return to the Seven Kingdoms! His Braavosi masters expect a return on their investment in him, and have sent him to meet Lord Arryn and Lady Sansa in the Vale. Currently, he is on board ship in Gulltown harbour, waiting to land in a couple of hours. Nor is his suffering over. The meeting must be very private. Accordingly, the Ship's Captain instructs him to climb into a large barrel, which has recently been used to transport pickled herrings. This will then be conveyed to his destination. Eventually, he senses the barrel being lifted, and loaded on to the back of a cart.

He remembers Lord Arryn as a little shit, who shrieked "Make the bad man fly! ", and wanted to throw him out the Moon Door at the Eyrie. That's another bad dream, too. What manner of man has he grown up to be? He wonders whether Mord still works at the Eyrie, happily abusing prisoners on behalf of Lord Arryn. Mord is unfinished business. The bastard tormented him, and he would love to pay him back in kind. A Lannister always pays his debts.

The cart comes to a halt. The barrel is carried a short distance, and the lid removed. Tyrion climbs out and he realises he is in a warehouse. The sailors leave, and he finds himself standing face to face with Lord Arryn and Lady Sansa, together with a pair of bodyguards. Sweetrobin is grinning at him, before saying, "Well, stand up, then." Tyrion groans inwardly, having heard the same joke a thousand times before. Still a shit, it seems

Sansa merely stares impassively at him, out of her cold blue eyes. The resemblance to her mother, Lady Catelyn, is uncanny. He knows she has recently given birth to her first child, a daughter, and yet that has done nothing to spoil her beauty. She addresses him, "I must apologise for the manner in which you were brought here, Lord Tyrion. It is necessary, you understand, that no one should know that this meeting is taking place. My sister's spies are everywhere. It's wonderful, is it not, that I must live in fear of my dear brother, and my sweet sister. Still, I suppose, if we were caught, Robyn and I would escape with a swift beheading. What they'd do to you would be a great deal more interesting."

That's one way of putting it, Lady Sansa. I presume you know who sent me?" Sansa and Sweetrobin
"My masters are convinced that war is coming with the Seven Kingdoms. If you raise your banners, they will acknowledge you both as King and Queen of the North, the Riverlands, and the Vale, and form a military alliance with you. The Iron Bank will finance your campaign as a gift, not a loan."

"And what must I do to earn this generosity from your masters? The Iron Bank is not noted for making gifts."

"Two things. Grant Braavos the monopoly of wood, pitch, furs and amber from White Harbour. And, exclude Tyroshi traders and bankers from your new kingdom.

"It's a tempting offer, Sansa" comments Sweetrobin.

"Obviously. But, we risk exchanging a dark mistress for a darker master. Still, a drowning woman will clutch at a serpent. Tell your masters we agree, save that the monopoly will not extend to amber."

"I believe that will be acceptable to them. Tell me Sansa, what armies can you field?"

"We have twelve thousand sellswords. Uncle Edmure can field fifteen thousand seasoned men, and the Vale, a similar number."

"And the North?"

"Perhaps five thousand."

"Why so few? King Robb brought 18,000 South."

"The Free Folk now inhabit the Gift. Tormund Giantsbane will raise his banners for my brother, as soon as war begins. Bran must keep soldiers in the North to fight him. Nor, are the Mormonts of Bear Island reliable. The Queen and my brother are cunning. They granted me the rule of the North, but they keep a dagger pointed at Winterfell."

"Say, fifty thousand, give or take. Will they stand against dragon fire?"

"Now I have news for you, on that score. Word reached me today from Kings Landing. The Queen has returned, but she is badly injured. It is doubtful whether she can take Drogon into battle. She has recruited for the Unsullied in the East, and they are being transported here by stages. My brother has a small standing army of his own, and I have no doubt, they can rely on the Stormlanders, the Reach, and the Dornish. The West will not intervene. The fall of your family left a vacuum, which Lord Marbrand struggles to fill. On land, I believe that we will be fairly evenly matched. However, Robyn and I are not seeking to conquer the South, merely to win our own freedom. All we have to do, is to make our enemies bleed."

As Sansa speaks, Tyrion notices Sweetrobin idly picking his nose, while staring into space. Well, it's clear who possesses the brains in this marriage

"Now, what military aid can your masters give to us? Other than their money, which is of course very welcome, Braavos is not a land power."

"Indeed not, but their navy is unrivalled. They can blockade the South, and prevent reinforcements coming from the East. They can raid across the Southern coastlands."

"Tyrosh will ally with the Queen. So, will the Iron Islands. They have their own fleets, to add to hers."
"Braavos has long adopted the policy that their own fleet must be at least as big as those of the next two naval powers combined. They can call on aid from Pentos, and Tyrosh has its own local enemies in any event. I'm confident the Braavosi will win at Sea."

"Then, tell your masters, we are agreed in principle. Once they give me a date, we shall raise our banners."

"I've got something for you, Lord Imp" says Sweetrobin, suddenly. He hands Tyrion an elegant wooden box. Inside, there is a rhino's horn with a silver lid. Tyrion opens the lid, to reveal a noxious-smelling substance.

"What is this?"

"Baboon excrement" sniggers Sweetrobin. "It's a powerful aphrodisiac. I've heard your own powers might be ..........flagging." *Little fucker*

"I thank you my lord. I shall take your gift in the spirit in which it was meant."

He climbs back into his stinking barrel, and waits to be returned to the ship.

Chapter End Notes

1. In Part I of The Dragon Awakes, Chapter 5, Daenerys sentenced Tyrion to death by the Punishment of the Sack. The sentence was suspended, so long as he never returned to Westeros. Braavos' commercial interest in the North was revealed in Chapters 11 and 12.

2. Lord Robyn Arryn is the son of Lord Jon and Lady Lysa Arryn, and is Sansa's first cousin. His mother nicknamed him Sweetrobin. He was an obnoxious child, and is obviously no better as a young man.

3. At the end of the War against the Dead, the Free Folk settled the Gift, an area of fertile, but sparsely populated, land, which is South of the Wall. Their leader is Tormund Giantsbane.
Chapter Summary

Push it to the limit
Walk along the razor's edge
But don't look down, just keep your head
Or you'll be finished

Open up the limit
Past the point of no return
You've reached the top but still you gotta learn
How to keep it
Hit the wheel and double the stakes
Throttle wide open like a bat out of hell
You crash the gates (Crash the gates)

Going for the back of beyond
Nothing gonna stop you, there's nothing that strong
So close now you're nearly at the brink
So, push it, ooh yeah

Welcome to the limit (Limit)
Take it baby one step more
The power game's still playing so
You better win it

Push it to the limit (Limit)
No one left to stand in your way
You might get careless, but you'll never be safe
While you're still in it

Welcome to the limit (Limit)
Standing on the razor's edge
Don't look down just keep your head
Or you'll be finished

Welcome to the limit
Push it to the limit.

(Paul Engerman, 1983).

30th September AC 313, Riverrun.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sansa walks the razor's edge. She is terrified, now. And, exhilarated. She has made her decision. Her uncle has assured her that his Bannermen will rally to her. In a few minutes, she will find out.
She has no choice but to secure their support. Lord Arryn is already riding to Harrenhall, with five thousand horse. Thousands more foot are now marching from the Vale. An Autumn and Winter campaign is not ideal, but it will be as hard for her enemies as for her. From Harrenhall to Kings Landing is a little over 250 miles. She must strike hard and fast, destroy the Dragon Queen, and then bargain with whatever is left. If Jon and Arya survive, she has no objection to their ruling in the South. But, she will be Queen of Three Kingdoms. A pity she has to share the government with the wretch she married; still, he brings an army. And a life without love is so much easier to endure. The two people she loved were monsters. Joffrey, the perfect, handsome Prince, who murdered her father and tortured her. And Margaery Tyrell, with whom she fell head over heels, after she pretended to be her friend. That was before Margaery and her grandmother poisoned Joffrey and framed her for the deed. No doubt, Margaery would have felt some regret as she watched me burn at the stake, but she loved the idea of being Queen even more.

She wonders what her mother and father would think if they could see her now. Admiration, pity, horror. She fears, probably the last of these. But, it is far too late now for second thoughts. Word has come from Braavos that their fleets are mobilising. Chests of coin have already arrived at Gulltown from the Iron Bank to pay her soldiers. She has communicated by raven with Bran, who has assured her that her plans are sound.

If only the Spider had poisoned the bitch, all those years ago

It's the Dragon Queen's fault that she must go to war with her family. Had she died, as intended, all those years ago, none of this need have happened. Sansa's family would have ruled in Kings Landing, Winterfell, Riverrun, and the Eyrie. Things could have been as they always were between them. But, Jon is to blame too. He chose his foreign whore over his brother and sister. She waits impatiently outside the Great Hall at Riverrun. Her uncle has been speaking to the River Lords for more than half an hour, hopefully convincing them that the time has come to strike. At last, a servant opens the door to the Great Hall. The roars and cheering that greet her are everything she could hope for. Men and women are drumming their fists and goblets on the table, cheering for her, applauding her. She realises this is the happiest moment of her life. Uncle Edmure, red-bearded and grinning, takes her hand and guides her to the dais, from which he has been speaking. His wife, Lady Rosalyn, smiles broadly as she produces a silver-gilt coronet, which she places on her niece's head, before bowing to her. Edmure draws his sword and sweeps it into the air, shouting "Behold, the Queen of the North, the Queen of the Riverlands, the Queen of the Vale." More cheers erupt at this. As the cheering ends, Sansa speaks

"I see no subjects here. I see only friends. Friends who are fighting with me, for their own freedom and that of their people! What has rule by the Lannisters, Baratheons, and Targaryens at Kings Landing ever brought you but war and ruin? The Lannisters murdered and raped your people. The Targaryens and Blackfyres brought you fire and blood. The Tyrells and Baratheons brought you nothing but disaster. But, my brother, and my mother, King Robb and Lady Catelyn, they fought for you and they gave their lives for you, as did our allies, the men of the North!" Roars of approval greet her words. "The men of the Vale are with us, too, and all the gold of Braavos. The Usurper is now a cripple, she cannot ride her dragon into battle. We can win, we will win! Take vengeance for your murdered King and for Lady Catelyn! " The crowd applaud again.

"Even as I speak, my husband rides to war. His men march behind him. We shall meet them at Harrenhall, and then drive for Kings Landing. We shall teach the false Queen who sits there the meaning of her House's words. We shall bring her "Fire and Blood", and spike her head on her own walls. And you shall be well rewarded for your valour".

The real business of the evening
“Every lord who rides to war will be showered with the gold of the Iron Bank. The lands we conquer will be yours for ever. The plunder of the Crownlands will be yours. We shall empty Kings Landing and burn it to the ground. Are you with me?” Shouts of approval greet her.

“You have all been told “War to the castles, peace to the villages”. That is how you have waged war, but not how the Lannisters and your enemies waged it. So now, I say “War to everything that moves, war to everything that can burn. Set the Crownlands ablaze from Rosby to Kings Landing; from Rooks Rest to Duskendale. You will make a horror that the poets will shudder to sing of a hundred years from now!” More cheers erupt.

Sansa draws a sword of her own, and raises it high "Though I have body of a weak and feeble woman, I have the heart and stomach of a King! Are you with me?"

The Great Hall erupts again. "Sansa, Sansa, Sansa" chant the assembled lords and ladies, until Lord Piper waves for silence and speaks.

"Are we fools, to fight for such a feeble cause."? There is a gasp of horror round the hall. Some men shake their fists at him, until he speaks "Shall my men bleed, simply so that our enemies can rule. This is Sansa Stark. The blood of Kings and Queens flows through her veins. When we take Kings Landing, why should she not rule the Seven Kingdoms, herself? Why should we not govern them on her behalf?" The crowd roars again.

Sansa’s heart leaps. This is more than she could ever have hoped for! And why not? No Lord or Lady in Westeros can match her lineage.

Edmure jumps up and raises his goblet "Lords and Ladies, gentlemen, I give you Her Grace, Sansa Stark, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men! Long may she reign."

"Long may she reign. long may she reign, long may she reign" chant the crowd, over and over.

Sansa can no longer speak for her tears. They are hers, now and forever. As the Valyrians used to say, "Alea Iacta Est." Monster though she was, Cersei had been right about one thing. "When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die."

Chapter End Notes

1. Push it to the Limit, from Scarface, is a great piece of music in a great film.

2. I always thought that Margaery's and Olenna's manipulation of Sansa, in both show and books, was horribly cynical. It's clear that Olenna framed her and Tyrion for the murder of Joffrey; Margaery's involvement is less clear cut, but Margaery would have had few qualms about watching her die, had she been caught. There is an immense amount of fanfiction in which Sansa forgives Margaery for her behaviour and they resume being best friends or lovers. I think it's more likely that Sansa would hate Margaery, once she worked out how she had been played.

3. Lord Varys, the Spider, attempted to poison Daenerys at Dragonstone. Sansa assisted him in this plot, as revealed in Part I, Chapter 9.

4. Alea Iacta Est "Let the dice fly high" or "The Dice are thrown". Allegedly spoken by Caesar when he crossed the Rubicon, indicating that there is no turning back.
Dark Tidings

Chapter Summary

1st October AC 313 Kings Landing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It is mid-morning, and Arya enters the Queen's Solar, for the meeting of the Small Council. Daenerys is lying on a couch, her back and neck propped up by cushions. The rest of the Council face her around a low table. Already present are Jon and his wife Mariah; the Master of War, Grey Worm; the Master of Ships, Ser Davos Seaworth; the Dornish representative Sarella Sand, yet another natural daughter of the late Prince Oberyn, this time with a Summer Islander; the Master of Coin, Ser Thomas Mott, a merchant prince; and the Master of Laws, Lord Rosby. Also present are an envoy from Tyrosh; Yara Greyjoy, who has a dozen ships of the Iron Fleet, anchored in the city harbour; Rakharo, commander of the Dothraki; and Ser Brienne of Tarth, just arrived in the city this morning. It suddenly strikes Arya that half the people present are women, and half are not noble (as an untitled younger daughter, she has never considered herself such). The wars have wiped out an entire ruling class of male lords across the Realm.

"So, it's war, then," Daenerys opens the discussion. She sounds slightly tired, and Arya doubts that the stuff she smokes is doing her any good. But, her grasp of the situation remains sharp as ever. "Braavos has delivered its ultimatum. We must compensate the Iron Bank for their losses in the last war; acknowledge the independence of the North, the Vale and the Riverlands; open the Realm to the Iron Bank, and rescind the embargo on Braavosi shipping. The independence of Volantis and Qohor is to be restored. And, last but not least, I must go into exile, in a location of their choosing. In return, they will acknowledge Jon as King of what remains of the Seven Kingdoms. At least, now, we know for certain that Lady Sansa has forged an alliance with them. Arya, we know that Sansa can rely on the North and the Vale. Can she rely on the Riverlands?"

"She is heading for Riverrun. I presume that she will raise her banners there, and the River Lords will follow her. Apart from the Blackwoods, that is. Their loyalty is to your House. However, I do not consider the North is as committed to her as your Grace thinks. Ser Brienne, let us hear your views."

"As you know, I swore allegiance to Lady Sansa, ever since she fled from the monster, Lord Bolton. I hate to say it, but she is not the woman I rescued. I swore to protect the Lady of Winterfell; not the traitor who is bringing war to the Realm, because she wants to wear a crown. She left me to protect Lord Bran, when she married Lord Arryn. He is as deep in treason as she is. I fled Winterfell six weeks ago, and rode hard for the coast. I took ship to Bear Island, and spoke to Dacey Mormont. Her words to me were "There is one King in the North, and his name is Jon Snow. " She sent me to the Iron Islands, and I arrived here with one of Queen Yara's captains.

Ser Davos speaks "Seems to me you should pick your chief and stick to her. Why should we trust you not to stab us in the back as you stabbed her?"

"I can answer that lie at a time and place of your choosing Ser Davos, If you've the guts to back it up with cold steel."
"Peace, please," says the Queen. "The last thing we need is to fight among ourselves. Ser Brienne, I am most grateful for what you have done. Is it your view that any other Lords will defy Winterfell."

"Tormund, for sure, your Grace, and the Flints of the Mountains. Manderly wavers. The others should support Bran."

"Better than I hoped for. Now, it is essential that Jon is proclaimed King of the Seven Kingdoms immediately. I shall issue the necessary Edict. His coronation can wait until the war is over, but all the Realm must know that he is King, and that any rebels are fighting to dethrone him, as well as myself. What of Lord Arryn?"

Arya speaks again "Your Grace, he brings his sellswords and all the power of the Vale South. Perhaps 8,000 heavy horse, and 20,000 foot."

"Good. We shall march North and crush them. I plan to finish the war on land in an afternoon." Gods, is she serious?

Jon speaks before she does "Daenerys, we still await Lord Gendry, the Prince of Dorne, and the Hightowers. Let's wait for them, and then we can be sure we have the advantage in numbers."

"Let me explain," replies the Queen. "You all know Sweetrobin. He is a fool, who believes himself a commander. If we ride to meet him, I believe he will offer us battle, on ground which I shall choose. He will not wait for the River Lords to join him. He will want all the glory for himself. I would not have risked such a battle with Bronze Yohn Royce, but he is long dead. The Vale Men lack experience of war. Royce brought 2,000 of them to Winterfell, but it is decades since the others fought. However, the River Lords will have no difficulty fielding seasoned men. No part of the Realm has seen as much war as the Riverlands. But, if I can smash Sweetrobin's army quickly, many of the River Lords will sue for peace. I shall offer peace to all who bend the knee, and return to their allegiance. The sellswords will not persist in a lost cause."

"And Lady Sansa?" asks Mariah quietly.

Sarella Sand speaks for the first time "Your Grace, the Realm cannot have two rival monarchs. Two rival *living* monarchs." Yara thumps the table with approval, as Ser Thomas and Lord Rosby nod their agreement.

"It is King Jon's decision" replies the Queen. Arya's heart is in her mouth, despite their conversation all those months ago. For all that her sister has done, she is still her flesh and blood. She's our sister, Jon. Don't sign her death warrant."

"She deserves death" says Jon, to a loud chorus of approval. "But, no man is more accursed than the kinslayer. She will be required to take vows, and confined to the strictest of Motherhouses, upon pain of death should she ever leave it." Arya thanks the gods, silently.

"Grey Worm", asks Jon "give me your opinion on the Queen's plan?"

"I believe Her Grace's plan is sound. I do not say that to be a sycophant. Her Grace and I have frequently disagreed over strategy and tactics. It is to her Grace's credit that she will defer to me on those matters on which I am an expert. So, I now say, she is right. The Unsullied are the best heavy infantry in the World. That is not a boast. It is a fact. We have broken heavy horse in the past. We will do so in the future. Horses will not charge home against well-trained infantry, armed with long spears, and with archers in their midst. Every Tribune has been appointed by me, and
trained by me, as have half the Centurions. The few incompetents have been dismissed. My men will deliver victory to you.

Prince, I'm sorry, King, Jon, your men are good, as well. They are not trained as we are, but they will bring you honour on the battlefield. We have ten thousand foot between us. You have your Horseguards, another thousand. The lords of the Crownlands can raise perhaps six thousand foot and two thousand horse in a hurry. And, we have Dothraki warriors, three thousands. The enemy will outnumber us slightly, but the Queen and I have faced worse odds on the battlefield. Far worse."

The Queen speaks again. "If I'm wrong, and Sweetrobin stays where he is, to await reinforcements, then our own reinforcements can march up the Kingsroad behind us. We will at least, protect the Crownlands from pillage. Rakharo, your warriors will ride before us. Harass the enemy, raid their supply lines, kill foragers and stragglers, but on no account do battle with their main host. Jon, you will command our horse, and Grey Worm our foot. I shall be in overall command. I can still ride a docile horse; the men must know that their Queen is with them.

"Who governs in our absence?" asks Jon.

"Mariah, will you serve as Regent? I'd understand if your condition made that impossible. Arya, will you act as her Hand?" They agree.

"What of the Sea" asks Ser Davos.

"I'll have forty ships here in a week," says Yara. "Give the word, Daenerys, and I'll reduce Gulltown to ashes!"

The Queen smiles. "A tempting offer, but Gulltown is a valuable port. I'll settle for Sweetrobin's head on a spike, and install a reliable Lord of the Vale. We cannot hope to take the offensive against the fleets of Braavos, for the time being. We must concentrate on protecting the Blackwater, and keeping shipping lanes open to Tyrosh and the East. Believe me, I shall bring ruin to Braavos, in due time, but let's deal with our enemies piecemeal."

The meeting breaks up. Arya feels a good deal happier than when she entered. Sansa sometimes talked about becoming a Septa when she was a girl. Now, she has a whole lifetime of religious devotion to look forward to.

Chapter End Notes

1. Army sizes. I've gone for the kind of army sizes that are given for The Dance of the Dragons, in Fire and Blood, rather than the much inflated numbers in ASOIAF.

Pre-industrial societies can't keep more than about 3-4% of the adult male population under arms for any length of time, without suffering major economic hardship. In addition, keeping an army adequately supplied in such a world is very hard. A rough rule of thumb is that about a ton of food per day is needed for every thousand men. On top of that, fodder is required for horses, and any other animals used for transport. Living off the land is no substitute for proper logistics. These factors all limit army sizes. A medieval battle like Towton, where 25-30,000 fought on each side, was unusual. It comprised about 10% of the adult male population of England in 1461, and remains the largest battle ever fought, here.
Poor communications in a medieval world would mean that it would be hugely difficult to exercise control over more than 30,000 men on the battlefield. 100,000 men (the size of Renly’s army in A Clash of Kings) would be more of a hindrance than a help on the battlefield. By way of comparison, the Roman Army under Augustus numbered about 300,000. But, this was divided into multiple forces on the frontiers. A Roman general would typically lead 10-20,000 men into a major fight.

2. I envisage the Unsullied at this point as being a kind of Praetorian Guard. Recruitment is now voluntary, and they include archers, and spearmen. Grey Worm has 6,000 under his command, as thousands more are stationed in the East. A Tribune commands 600, a Centurion 100. Obviously, castration is no longer a requirement (that would make recruitment very difficult).

3. Women in power. Westeros, like most pre-industrial societies, has long taken the view that its leaders should be male. Women are not barred from power, but men are usually preferred (outside of Dorne, which has equal primogeniture). I am assuming that the deaths of so many lords and nobles in the recent round of civil wars have had the effect of normalising the idea that women are entitled to wield power - outside of the Vale, which was almost untouched by war.
Queen Alysanne's Cross

Chapter Summary

18th October AC 313. Queen Alysanne's Cross, a village one hundred and eighty miles North of Kings Landing.

Seated on his horse, Sweetrobin nods his head, and the six prisoners are hauled into the air, on ropes, slung from the branches of trees. They kick and piss themselves, for a time, until the last one is still. He laughs and turns to Lord Waynwood "You owe me five gold dragons, my Lord. I told you the lightest one would be the last to stop wriggling. Always bet on the lightest. What did he do anyway?"

"Stabbed one of my archers in the guts, your Grace. Just because my man wanted his chickens." Lord Waynwood hands him a five dragon piece.

"Well, the world won't miss one idiot more or less."

"How far away is the whore's army?"

"About ten miles South, according to my scouts. I'd say here's as good a place as any to offer her battle. We've got the slope in our favour, and her men will have to cross the brook to reach us."

"I see you caught one of the savages", Lord Waynwood points to the corpse of a Dothraki, hanging with the others.

"Would that I could catch more of them! One thing they're good at is riding away from trouble. They're quite prepared to attack forage parties, and my teamsters, but show them cold steel, and they gallop away as fast they can. King Robert was supposedly frightened of them. They seem hugely overrated to me."

In truth, Sweetrobin is in a fantastic mood. When word reached him at Harrenhall of Daenerys’ advance, with inferior forces, he had immediately ridden South. Here was the chance to settle the war once and for all. A couple of his sellsword commanders had counselled waiting for the River Lords to join their strength to his, but his own lords had dismissed their concerns. They had cheered when he had declared "In war, there is nothing more dangerous than too little boldness," and ordered the drive South. The Lord of Harrenhall had already brought him three hundred horse, and a thousand foot, giving him a substantial advantage in numbers. They probably aren't even necessary. He leads eight hundred knights of the Vale, and thousands more of the gentry on horseback. He supposes the footmen have their uses, but it will be his cavalry that ride the enemy to ruin. Let the enemy exhaust their strength by attacking his forces uphill, and then he will release his heavy horse, and destroy them.

He wonders what he'll do to the bitch Queen, when he's captured her. Hang her in front of his men? Strip her naked and drag her back to Harrenhall? Or maybe keep her as his whore at the Eyrie? The last would be best. He's never had a Queen before, and she'll probably be sweeter in bed than the shrew he married. Gods above, fucking Sansa is like writhing around on a mortuary slab! He's looking forward to enjoying the strapping peasant wench that his men have brought to his quarters, after dinner. Some of them are damned good-looking once they've had a bath.
He turns to his aide, Ser Jon Royce and gives his orders "We make our stand here. Summon my lords and captains to my quarters, to discuss tomorrow's battle."

On the same day, in late afternoon, Jon is riding by the stream, at the foot of the hill where Sweetrobin is encamped. The Kingsroad crosses it on a wide stone bridge, although the brook itself is not impassable. The ground by the stream is damp, but not marshy, slowing his horse, without completely preventing movement. With him ride the Queen, Grey Worm, Ser Brienne, Rakharo, and several bodyguards. They examine the slope carefully. It is not steep, but it is a good half mile to the banners and tents of the Vale men.

"Sweetrobin's chosen his position well. Perhaps, we've underestimated him? Attacking up that hill is going to be a bitch!" he comments. "The slope will give his archers a big advantage, once we come within range, and then he'll unleash his cavalry on us.

"We'd better get him off that hill then" says the Queen. Jon sees she has real colour in her cheeks, now, for the first time in months. She has mostly travelled by carriage with the army, but she rides as well. Campaigning clearly suits her, and thank the gods, she's no longer smoking that bloody poppy resin in such quantities as before. "I'm sure you and Grey Worm have one or two ideas how it can be done."

"I do have a plan" comments Grey Worm. "You have not underestimated him. He should have his skirmishers harassing us, so that we can't examine the ground in front of his position. He's overconfident. He thinks we have no choice but to charge up that hill. I intend to make use of that overconfidence."

"What do you have in mind?" asks Ser Brienne.

"I suggest we discuss it with the principal lords and captains, in the Queen's quarters. "

Inside the Queen's pavilion, they eat a light supper, while Grey Worm outlines his plans, to them, and to the other commanders. Various suggestions are made, but the plans are generally approved. The commanders gradually file out, leaving Jon and Daenerys on their own. Jon pours them both another goblet of wine.

"Not too much, Jon, we'll need our wits about us tomorrow. We can get blind drunk when we've won." It is now quite dark, and in the candlelight, the Queen looks much as he remembers her, when she set sail for the East all those years ago, the lines of her face softened.

"Jon, do you believe in the gods?", she asks suddenly.

"My belief comes and goes. But, our view of the gods, in the North, is not the same as in the South. In a sense, everyone becomes a god after death, watching over the living, but also seeing the past."

"But, you've died. You know what lies beyond the veil."

"I don't. I remembered nothing, when Melisandre brought me back."

"I don't know what to think. The Red Priests think I've come to rid the world of unbelievers. My first husband thought we'd ride the night skies together, after death. If the Septons and Septas are right, I'm facing an eternity of torment, after death......I've done some terrible things in my life."

"You have. You told me to be honest with you. But, you're still a good ruler. Better than any we've had since your great-grandfather. You saved the world, when you came North to fight the Dead."
You freed millions in the East. Does it matter what your motives were? The world is a better place, because of you."

"Maybe I should accept my enemies' demands, and go into exile."

"You would die. They cannot let you live. And they would kill me, and Mariah, and my son. We're simply too much of a danger to them. And, Sansa would not make a good Queen. Her prisons are no more pleasant than yours, but she has none of your virtues. She hated Cersei when she was her prisoner in all but name, but I'm afraid she became Cersei. That was Cersei's victory, to destroy anything that was good in my sister."

Jon takes her in his arms, and this time, she reciprocates. They kiss passionately for a time, before the Queen leads him to her bed. After, they have finished making love, she lies in his arms. "Jon, I meant what I said about your son. If we survive tomorrow, we must never do this again". And that's the truth, he reflects ruefully, as he leaves the pavilion, to snatch what sleep he can, before the coming battle.
Daenerys wakes in the hour before the dawn. She gets out of bed and washes her face and hands in a basin of cold water. A bath can wait until after the battle. With the assistance of Nouronohar, she dresses in a black leather jerkin and breeches, tucked inside a pair of boots. Over that, she wears a black and scarlet brigandine and steel collar. Her maid straps a short blade in a scabbard, to the belt around her waist. Next, the maid binds up her hair, and places a black steel helmet on her head. A small gold coronet is attached to it. Finally, she wraps a scarlet cloak around her. She takes a small glass of wine, but can eat nothing, her stomach is so clenched. The maid curtsies, saying "Your Grace, you are dressed to kill." She will not, however, be close to the front line. She is not sufficiently strong to wear a suit of mail or steel plate.

As she steps out into the camp, the followers of the Red God are already chanting by their holy fires, as they wait the Dawn. Many of the Unsullied and Dothraki are now converts, and even some of the Crownlanders. Her squires, Jory Dayne, and Rickard Velaryon, lead her white mare, and assist her to mount it. By now, the camp is stirring. Grey Worm rides up to greet her. As always, the man is fully armoured; his squire is under orders always to wake him an hour before dawn. They are presently joined by Ser Brienne, King Jon, Rakharo, and Lords Sunglass and Bar Emmon, who command the forces of the Crownlands. They hold a brief conference on horseback, before dispersing to their tasks. Grey Worm gestures with contempt to the hill across the brook. "Almost Sunrise, and they've yet to stir. Our scouts have been out for an hour already. This day will be ours."

Sweetrobin rises with the dawn. He feels a little delicate after the night before. It really was quite the party. The wine flowed and the girls made the evening go with a swing. His own wench is still asleep in his bed, and he sees no need to dismiss her yet. He goes to the door of his pavilion, unbuttons himself and empties a stream of piss on to the ground. He calls for his squire, who helps him into his armour. Gods! He looks like the Warrior himself! He wears a suit of gleaming silver-steel plate, studded with sapphires, with a silver and sapphire coronet, and a blue cloak. He swings himself into the saddle and rides to meet the other lords.

He rides with them through the camp to the edge of the slope. Ser Jon Royce, Lords Waynwood, Royce, Redfort, Corbray, his cousin, Arryn of Gulltown, and a dozen more men of quality. They are joined by his sellsword commanders, Caspario and Meris, who is unusually, a woman. An extremely ugly woman, but capable, he understands. He surveys the battlefield. The brook at the foot of the slope is about half a mile away, and the enemy camp about a mile beyond that, already astir. The morning is cold, but fine, and that will help his archers. His front is about a mile and a half long, with thick woods at either side. He took the advice of Ser Jon, and has placed skirmishers in the woods. He cannot be outflanked. The battle will be a slogging match, and that will favour the more numerous side. "Archers, and spearmen to their marks, horse to form up, ready to charge when I give the word", he orders.
"My lord, pardon, your Grace" says Meris. "Caspario and I have served in the East under Daenerys Targaryen, and Grey Worm. They are not fools. I have never served under Jon Targaryen, but I have heard he is a most puissant warrior. On no account would I propose that we leave the security of our position. I believe our position is impregnable so long as we stand firm. Our flanks are secure. Let the enemy mount their attacks, and we shall beat them off. They shall eventually retire, and the day will be yours. Their army will not be routed, but you will have drawn first blood."

Various lords shake their heads, and snort with contempt at her suggestion. "Your Grace," says Redfort. "We are faced by eunuchs and savages. Yes, there are men of high birth among the Crownlanders, but precious few, and we have the finest men of the Vale with us. Would your Grace really wish to show himself afraid, before them?" "Damn it, no!" cries Sweetrobin. "We shall break this rabble! To your places, gentlemen!"

Meris rides away with Caspario and they talk softly. "These men are overbred idiots" she says. "Huh, what highborn ever took advice from a sellsword?"

"Daenerys Targaryen?"

"My point precisely. I agree with you. Grey Worm wants us off that ridge. When our noble King sounds the charge, tell our own captains not to be too eager. Our cavalry will have to charge with them - and maybe they'll break the Queen's army - but if they don't, be ready to ride to safety."

"Agreed"

Across the river, Jon rides out of the camp at the head of a thousand men, Ser Brienne at his side. They are mix of Jon's horseguards, and cavalry from the Crownlands. They have discarded plate armour and lances for padded jacks, swords, and battle axes. They have a long way to ride, and must move fast, so it is essential they travel light. It is very important today that Sweetrobin should think that Jon remains with the main body of the army. A knight of his own height is currently wearing Jon's armour, helm, and cloak, while his standard bearer prominently displays Jon's sigil, the Direwolf of Winterfell quartered with the three-headed dragon of the Targaryens. They trot South down the Kingsroad, though woodlands that screen them from view, for about three miles, before reaching a crossroads. They take the road east, riding roughly parallel to the stream which runs between the two camps. They keep riding for about three miles, before Jon calls a halt. One of his men is keeping count. Getting the timing right is essential.

A short while afterwards, the main army starts moving out of the camp, with Grey Worm riding at front with Rakharo and the Dothraki, followed by a detachment of Horseguards and Crownlands cavalry, then the Unsullied and Jon's footmen, the remaining foot, with more cavalry bringing up the rear with Daenerys. Grey Worm notes with approval that the Dothraki are wearing thick silk vests and cuirasses of boiled leather. It was a long struggle to persuade them to wear armour of any kind, but it has saved countless lives, and as light as it is, does not hinder their speed. The Dothraki begin crossing the brook, gathering on the other side. They spend a lot of time riding up and down the banks, shrieking and capering. It is important that enemies think them a rabble of savages. The rest of the army gradually forms into line. It is now about about Nine O'clock.

Sweetrobin laughs to himself as he watches the Dothraki working themselves up into a battle rage by the brook. He can scarcely believe that a few thousand savages would think they could charge uphill and break his lines, but he can't deny the evidence of his own eyes. And now he knows exactly how he'll win this battle. His archers will tear the Dothraki to pieces, he'll unleash his cavalry, and they'll drive the Dothraki back into the ranks of the Unsullied. In the confusion, they'll cut both Unsullied and Dothraki to pieces, then wheel to the left to roll up Jon's footmen and the Crownlanders. Any men of rank will be kept for ransom, but the commons can be put to the sword.
He turns to Ser Jon, and outlines his plan, instructing him to inform the other commanders. "Boldness wins battles, you see."

"Your Grace's boldness" replies Ser Jon, before riding off.

Sweetrobin starts to get bored as the Dothraki continue their antics, but at last, he sees them form up to charge. Now for it! Thousands of them come tearing up the slope on their ponies towards his men. He hears the vintinars and sergeants calmly ordering his archers to notch and draw. At three hundred paces from the horsemen, his archers let loose, bringing down dozens. Seconds later, an unwelcome volley is returned from the composite bows of the horsemen. An arrow even strikes his shoulder, spinning away behind him. The quality of his plate means he comes to no harm, but it is unwelcome, nonetheless. He decides that discretion is the better part of valour, and lowers his vizor. He is not surprised that the Dothraki cannot charge home, against his archers and spearmen. It would be suicide to do so. They wheel and turn constantly, hammering shaft after shaft into his lines, but his own archers are taking their toll. He judges there must be at least two hundred of them lying dead on the slope. Let them waste their lives this way! He senses the mood of excitement among his horsemen, as they await his word to charge. Steady, steady, timing will be everything. Then he hears a shriek, about fifty paces to his right. He turns to see Lord Waynwood clap his hand to his face. The bloody idiot forgot to lower his vizor and took an arrow in the eye. The man howls again and again. Waynwood's horsemen are livid, and begin to edge forward, itching to avenge their lord.

The Dothraki seem to have had enough. They are increasingly hesitant, exchanging arrows at a distance with own archers. Now is the time to charge. He raises his lance, the signal for advance, and the mass of cavalry begins to trot forward, some of them belabouring those foot who are slow to get out of their way with the flats of their swords. The Dothraki see what is coming their way, and start to turn and flee in panic. Now the hunt is on!

Grey Worm grins as he sees the Dothraki stream back down the slope towards the brook, followed by the mass of Vale cavalry. Straight into the cut Sweetrobin

His men are about two hundred paces from the brook, away from the damp ground. As the Dothraki tear towards them, their ponies only slightly slowed by the damp ground and the brook, his men open their ranks to allow the horsemen to ride through, a manoeuvre they've practised scores of times in the past. It never ceases to surprise him how often an overconfident enemy will fall for a faked retreat. His men close ranks again, as the last of the Dothraki pass through, and start to march against the oncoming cavalry. He can see that the damp ground has slowed them considerably, given the weight of their amour, robbing their charge of its momentum.

Sweetrobin is furious. He is in the van of the cavalry, and their ranks have fallen into confusion. They caught some of the Dothraki on the slope and cut them down, but they are now safe among the ranks of his enemies. He orders his men on, and they ford the stream, but the ground is hard going, with this weight of steel. He sees the front ranks of the Unsullied level their spears, now no more than eighty paces from him. The damp ground slows them as well, but not nearly so much as the horse. Still, there are now hundreds of men across the brook and he orders them to charge again. His blood is up, and he'll break the Unsullied! They at least manage to trot, and lower their lances. And, now, he makes an unwelcome discovery. Far from having fled, the Dothraki have dismounted, and are in among the Unsullied, pouring arrows into his ranks at close range. Men and horses are going down in earnest now. He turns to Ser Jon and yells at him "Get up that fucking slope, and bring the footmen down to join us! We've still got numbers on our side!" He sees more cavalry pushing their way across the brook, their ranks colliding with those in front of him. The front ranks of his men now close with the Unsullied, beating down with swords, axes and war hammers. All across the line, Unsullied are falling, but their ranks remain unbroken, men moving
up to replace those who have fallen. And, the Unsullied are taking a toll of their own, spearing horses and men alike. He is now face to face with one of the brutes, deftly turning his spear with the cross guard of his sword, before driving the blade into the joint between his neck and head. His horse is trained to fight too, and rears upwards, its right hoof smashing the head of an Unsullied like an egg. He can still break the Unsullied, and turns to urge his men on, only to discover that the Unsullied are driving most of them back towards the brook. Hundreds of men and horses have gone down, speared by the Unsullied, or shot down by the Dothraki. Worse, Jon’s own footmen and more horse are joining the fray, and there is real danger of his being surrounded. Quite suddenly, his courage deserts him. Time to get back up that fucking hill! He rides for the brook, trampling over a couple of his own fallen men in his desperation.

Meanwhile, Jon and his men have been riding North, across open fields. They destroy crops, and drive away livestock as they ride. It occurs to Jon that he’ll have to compensate the peasants for their losses. They reach the stream, about three miles up from the main battle, cross it, then and ride uphill to join the Kingsroad, North of Queen Alysanne’s Cross. He halts as he reaches the road on the brow of the hill. He can hear the din of battle, and then turns South down the Kingsroad at a slow canter. Within a few minutes, he is riding through the Village, and then he and his horse hit the rear ranks of the enemy footmen. He is outnumbered at least ten to one, but no soldiers will stand against horse who take them in the rear. Jon draws Longclaw, driving it through the throat of a spearman, and then striking the head clean off an archer. Quite suddenly, the enemy foot break, split like a rotten plank. Some flee South, down the slope others East and West, but it doesn’t matter. They just want to get away. Jon halts on the ridge, watching as his horsemen split the enemy foot into ever smaller groups. He has no interest in maximising casualties, just breaking them apart.

"Time to furl the flag" says Meris to one of her lieutenants. They are two hundred paces from the brook, watching as the elite of the Vale are steadily butchered by the Queen’s forces. Her horsemen turn rapidly to the East, and gallop away, parallel to the brook. She hopes Caspario will make it out alive, but she has no intention of waiting around to see if he does.

Sweetrobin has crossed the brook, and begins riding back up the slope. Most of his horsemen have the same idea, to get back to safety on the ridge. To his horror, thousands of his infantry are now pouring down the slope towards them. He wonders if they misunderstood his command. This is no orderly advance! Then he sees the direwolf and dragon banners waving from the ridge, and his blood runs chill. His horse pitches forward, feathered with Dothraki arrows, but he still manages to roll free, before it hits the ground. On his feet, he sees three Dothraki riding uphill towards him. There is nowhere left to run. There is only one thing left to do! He draws off his right gauntlet, and raises his visor, screaming "I yield, I yield! I am worth a King’s ransom!" . The first Dothraki just laughs, saying something in his incomprehensible language, before casting his lasoo, pulling him down. The other two dismount, and draw their aracks. They hack repeatedly at his neck, as he screams, and cries, and dies.

Daenerys watches the rout of the Valemen, from the other side of the brook, with satisfaction. Grey Worm and Jon have timed this victory to perfection. Her heart leaps with joy as she sees a Dothraki rider screaming with triumph, brandishing a man’s head on the end of a spear. Even at this distances, she can see that there is a silver coronet attached to this grisly trophy. It can only be Sweetrobin! The war on land is over now, just as she promised the Small Council.

The war on land is over. But then the bad things happen.

Chapter End Notes
1. As the English found at Bannockburn, charging at infantry armed with long spears across damp ground is not a good idea.

2. Meris and Caspario are mentioned as lieutenants of the Tattered Prince, and Brown Ben Plumm respectively, in a Dance with Dragons.

3. Mongol light cavalry wore silk vests and boiled leather, as an effective protection against arrows.
Funeral Games

Chapter Summary

19th October AC 313 Queen Alysanne's Cross

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Daenerys carefully rides up the slope, with her squires and bodyguards, towards the ridge. Away from the brook, there are surprisingly few bodies. The enemy foot broke and fled, rather than fighting back. In truth, they still had the numbers, but only the most motivated footmen will stand against cavalry who catch them by surprise. And, many of these foot had been sellswords; good enough as fighters, certainly, but not the sort of men who will fight to the bitter end. Some of her men are laughing and cavorting in victory, others are binding prisoners, or putting enemy wounded out of their misery.

She hears a commotion behind her, someone shouting "Make way for his high and mightiness. " She turns to see one of her sergeants leading a headless corpse, tied to a horse. Half a dozen soldiers march behind chanting "The King of the Vale, the King of the Vale." Most amusingly, someone has attached a rooster's head to the stump of Sweetrobin's neck. She bursts out laughing, crying "He wasn't so good-looking when he was alive" provoking more mirth. Such ingenuity demands reward, and she gives each man a gold dragon from her purse.

She reaches the ridge in excellent spirits, only to encounter Ser Brienne, her face a mask of grief and anguish, surrounded by soldiers crying and cursing. She feels a wave of nausea and terror, and as if from a distance someone cries "The King is murdered." She faints and reels from her saddle, but is caught by Rickard Velaryon, before she hits the ground.

When she comes to, a healer is bathing her face, as she lies on a straw mattress on one of the cottages in the village. Ser Brienne gently restrains her, as she tries to rise. The healer presses a flask of spirits to her lips, and she drinks greedily, steadying her nerves. "How?" she asks. Brienne gestures to a Horseguard to approach the Queen.

"It was a vile bugger's trick ma'am. Me and the lads had cornered a knight and some of his men in one of the houses. He offered to yield, but only to a man of rank. The King was riding by, and said he'd accept. He went to the door, and the man pulled off his gauntlet and handed it to the King with one hand, and stabbed him in the throat with the other. There was nothing we could do. The lads wanted to string him up on the spot, but I thought, you'd want to deal with the fucker personally. We've worked him over, but he's still alive."

For several minutes she just stares at the ceiling, her mind numb. "Why I aren't I grieving? I should be weeping my eyes out. Because you're a monster, that's why? An abomination, who should have been destroyed in the womb to save your mother's life."

Eventually she says "I must see the King. Assist me to rise." Brienne helps her up, and she walks unsteadily to the door. She turns to the Horseguard and asks "What is your name, trooper?"

"Jack Tyler, ma'am, corporal, third Horseguards. "
"Well, now you're a sergeant." He gives a smart salute, and leads her to the cottage where Jon has been laid out. She stares down at the red ruin of his throat, again feeling numbed. *My love, couldn't you have sent one of your own squires to take a surrender? You were a lion on the battlefield, murdered by a jackal*"

Numbness is now replaced by an icy, implacable, rage. "Show me the murderer."

She is led down the street to where a group of soldiers stands guard over a bruised blond-haired man. An oak tree overhangs the scene.

"Did you know that you had murdered your King," she asks the man.

The man just spits on the ground. "He was no King of mine, nor you my Queen. A deserter from the Night's Watch and a horse lord's slut."

She points upward to one of the tree branches. "Sergeant Tyler, string this man up by his heels. Then, saw him in half, lengthways."

"Be glad to do it, Ma'am." She watches for some time, until the man's shrieks have subsided to whimpers. But, this is only the start.

Grey Worm approaches. "Grey Worm, you have my very great thanks for achieving victory, but the King is murdered by a hound." Grey Worm curses violently. "I need you to separate the men of quality from the rest of the prisoners. Separate the knights from the gentry, and the lords from the knights. " She knows how she will appease Jon's shade. The process takes several hours, and she manages to force down some bread and cheese to settle her stomach. It is like eating ash. By late afternoon, several hundred prisoners have been gathered, just below the ridge.

"How many?" she asks Grey Worm. "Three hundred and nineteen esquires, one hundred and five anointed knights, twenty two lords" he replies.

"Good. The esquires are to be blinded, and their hands cut off. One man in ten will be left with a single eye, to guide them home." There is a sharp intake of breath from Lord Sunglass, who is standing next to her. "The King will be burned on a pyre, in the manner of his ancestors, tomorrow. The knights of the Vale will be thrown into the fire with him. " Sunglass is now horrified. "The lords. I want them crucified on this ridge. They can watch from their crosses, as the rest takes place." Ser Brienne and Bar Emmon are shaking their heads and objecting. "Your Grace," cries Bar Emmon "these are men of quality. If you judge their lives forfeit, they merit the sword or axe."

"They merit whatever I give them. They raised their hands against their anointed King. To me, they are worth less than the meanest peasant in this Realm. Grey Worm, Rakharo, see to it."

"Your will, my Queen" replies Grey Worm, and turns to give orders to his men.

Now she can grieve. She returns to her cottage, and spends the evening keening and sobbing, oblivious to the screaming outside.

Chapter End Notes

1. Jon's murder takes place in a very similar fashion to the murder of Sultan Murad by
a Serbian knight, straight after the Battle of Kosovo. Sawing was used a punishment for regicide and attempted regicide in both the Ottoman Empire and Persia.

2. Daenerys certainly got medieval on her enemies' asses in this chapter. In her rage and grief, she's forgotten how she intended to bring the revolt to an end. The mass blinding is based on Basil II's treatment of Bulgarian prisoners after the Battle of Kleidon.
Sansa had ridden into Harrenhall in a rainstorm, with her honour guard, five days previously, eager to inform her Lord husband that the River Lords had acclaimed them as King and Queen of the Seven Kingdoms. It had occurred to her, on the ride back from Riverrun, that this might be over-ambitious, but the honour had been flattering indeed. But, within a few hours of her arrival, she realised that hers was a very hollow crown indeed. She had been surprised to discover that most of the army had marched South, leaving just a few hundred men in the fortress. Still, she supposed that the Vale Lords and sellswords knew their business. She was immediately disabused of that idea, as stragglers started returning from Queen Alysanne's Cross that very day, bearing news of the shattering defeat. A succession of horrors followed. First, the death of her lord husband. Not that she cared for the man, but she and her daughter, Catelyn, at the Eyrie were now left in deadly danger. Then, news of the death of Jon. Naturally, she blamed the Dragon Queen for his death. She had seduced him, corrupted him, and turned him against his own family. And then, he had died in battle fighting for her. It had never occurred to her that she might bear any part of the blame. And then, the final horror story. The blinding of hundreds of the Vale gentry, the burning of the knights on Jon's funeral pyre, and the crucifixion of the lords. Cruel as she knew the Dragon Queen to be, it beggared belief that she could order such deaths for members of her own class. It was clear that she could expect a similar fate if she were captured. Sansa Stark, the Queen of the North who died on a cross

She had promised to teach the Dragon Queen the meaning of Fire and Blood, only to receive a dreadful lesson of her own.

Still, lack of courage had never been one of her faults. She had ridden out with the few remaining horsemen to search for stragglers. She thanked them for their services to House Arryn, providing them with food and blankets, and encouraging them to continue to Harrenhall. And, then she came upon the blinded men, on the Kingsroad, perhaps twenty miles South of the castle. Nothing in her imagination had prepared her for the sight of hundreds of moaning, soughing men, staggering forward, each with one maimed arm, resting on the shoulder of the man ahead of him. And, these were the lucky ones! From talking to the survivors, she understood that there three hundred and nineteen of them to begin with, although a quarter of those had died or fallen out along the way. Many of them had eye sockets running with pus, or even festering with maggots. This was a nightmare that would never leave her. She doubted if even her first husband would have done such a thing. She had ridden hard for Harrenhall, and arranged for carts to head South to collect the poor men. She had ordered they be returned to the castle at night, so as not to disturb the rest of the garrison. Harrenhall was so huge that a place could be found for them, outside of the gaze of the other soldiers.

In the meantime, she had busied herself with organising supplies for the River Lords, some of whose soldiers had now started to arrive at the castle. Disgracefully, most of the remaining
Noteables at Harrenhall had suggested running for the safety of their own castles. If they fled, she knew that the morale of the soldiers would collapse. Threatening, cajoling, bargaining, she had managed to persuade the majority of them to stay, at least until the end of Samhain. The celebrations for the Autumn festival begin tonight. She and they must participate as if they have not a care in the world. The Smallfolk expect bravery in the face of danger from their leaders, else how can they show bravery themselves.

As night begins to fall, the people of the castle light great bonfires in the courtyard, to welcome the spirits of the dead. How many of them perished in Jon’s funeral pyre, to sate the rage of Daenerys Targaryen? Who will they blame? The Queen of Ashes? My late husband, who led them to disaster? Or me?

She shivers at the thought, as she watches men and women, disguised in the masks and costumes of horses, wolves, bears, demons, dancing and capering around the fires. She enters the Great Hall, where feasting and revelry will take place through the night. She takes the place of honour at the High Table, seated next to Ser Addam Webber, brother of the Lord of the castle, who perished on the battlefield. Bards sing of Florian and Jonquil and Jenny of Oldstones, while mummers and jugglers perform their tricks. There is also less edifying entertainment, in the form of a professional farter, who sets the guests roaring with laughter. As usual, she finds herself blushing furiously.

"This castle is full of ghosts, your Grace", remarks Ser Addam. "Harren and his sons, Lord Gargon the gross, Rhaena Targaryen, the Strong, the Whents, and I suppose, my brother. Not to mention, Lord Baelish.........I'm sorry, it was tactless of me to mention him."

"Don't worry, Ser, his death brought me nothing but satisfaction."

"It brought all of us satisfaction. It brought us justice. It showed that in you, we have a queen who is truly worth following. Unlike the other. I'm sorry that my brother died on the field, but far better he do so than fall into her hands."

"I would take my own life, rather than let that happen."

"The only person in the world more cruel than her own father. Yet, we underestimate her to our peril. She came from nowhere to rule half the world. No one does that by being kind."

They are interrupted by a fortune teller. Divining is a traditional part of the festivities. The woman examines the palm of her right hand closely, tracing the lines, before saying simply "You will die old, and outlive your worst enemy." She’s just telling me what I wish to hear.

Still, she thanks the woman, and gives her a silver stag.

The guests are now getting up to dance. There is a wild gaiety and abandon about the festivities, the determination of doomed men and women to enjoy one last fling before the end. And why not?

"May I have the honour?" ask Ser Addam, rising from the table.

"Of course." She takes his hand and they dance with the others. Dancing has always been one of her skills, though neither of her husbands appreciated it. Lord Bolton’s pastimes were rape and torture. Sweetrobin’s were hunting and whoring. She dances with other men and women, but returns to Ser Addam again. After her fifth cup of wine, it occurs to her just how attractive he is, with jet black hair and piercing blue eyes. At that moment, he asks “Your Grace, are you as beautiful unclad, as when you appear before us fully clothed?”
"I could have your tongue for that, Ser."

"But, will you?"

She won't. In her bedchamber that night, with Ser Addam, she discovers for the first time in her life that sex can be a pleasure.

Chapter End Notes

1. All cultures have an Autumn festival, whether called Samhain, All Saints Day, Hallow E'en. It seems logical that Westeros would do so.

2. Medieval festivities frequently included petteurs, who would entertain guests with their farting. One Roland, was so good that Henry II granted him a manor.
Chapter Summary

3rd November and afterwards AC 313, Daenerys' camp, five miles North of Queen Alysanne's Cross

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The stench is the first thing Arya notices. The sickly sweet smell of rotting flesh, combined with the fouler odour of excrement. The reek causes her horse to shy and baulk as she rides through the village with her bodyguards. She claps a handkerchief to her face, as her mouth floods with saliva. She notices that the village remains abandoned. It will ever be a place of ill-omen, and the inhabitants will look to settle elsewhere. Down by the stream, pits had been dug in which the dead soldiers were buried. But, she guesses that the Queen wants the crucified men to remain nailed to their crosses, shrivelling and blackening as the elements claim them, until their bones eventually fall off. She hates the men who killed Jon just as much the Queen does, but what was she thinking? The nobles of the Seven Kingdoms might regard the deaths of the Smallfolk at Kings Landing, all those years ago, as just an act of war. But, strike at their own class, and they will revile you as the worst of tyrants. She steels herself, and glances at the dead lords. Their eyes, lips and noses are gone, but birds of prey still squabble with each other to tear strips of flesh from their bodies. She spurs her horse on and canters fast through the village, eager to put the sight behind her.

She rides on up the Kingsroad, and sees the army camp in the distance. The landscape has been transformed. A stout palisade, with wooden towers situated at regular intervals, protects the camp. Ballistae are stationed in each tower. Ditches lined with multiple rows of stakes create a formidable barrier for anyone wanting to assault the camp. Although she is no soldier, she can see that Grey Worm and his officers bring a level of professionalism to warfare that the knights and nobles of the Seven Kingdoms have never encountered. She and her party reach the entrance to the camp. After checking them, the guards wave them through, and they trot onwards to the Queen's pavilion. On reaching it she dismounts, to be met by Ser Brienne, and Grey Worm. "How is the Queen" she asks them? Ser Brienne simply rolls her eyes upwards and Grey Worm replies "Not well."

"I must see her", she replies. After a moment's hesitation, Grey Worm agrees, and they enter the pavilion, to be greeted by Nouronohar. "Please do not blame me, my Lady" says the handmaid. "I've drawn baths for her Grace, prepared her meals, brought her wine, and she just ignores me."

"No one's blaming you" replies Arya. She enters the Queen's bedchamber. It smells bad, a mix of sweat, wine, and that infernal poppy smoke. Clothes, books, blankets, and jewellery are strewn across the floor. The Queen is sprawled across her bed, wearing just a filthy bathrobe, and her face is like wax. She is lost, in a drug-induced stupor, hand still clutching her pipe. She resembles a corpse. Arya feels a mix of pity and anger. She knows just how hard the death of Jon has hit the Queen. It hit her just as hard, and Mariah, back in the capital. But, the Queen does owe it to Aegon and Mariah and her followers to remain in control of her faculties, at this moment of crisis.

"Please leave us" she tells Grey Worm. She instructs Nouronohar to prepare a fresh bath, and
proceeds to tidy the bedchamber. She takes the pipe out of the Queen's hand, and makes a point of searching the room for every piece of poppy resin she can find. She hands them to Nouronohar on her return, instructing her to keep them under lock and key. Eventually, the Queen's bath is ready. Small though Arya is, the Queen is light as a feather, and it is easy to pick her up.

She stirs half awake, opening her eyes and mumbling incoherently. She looks sadly on the scarred, twisted body of a woman who was once physical perfection. She lowers her gently into the bath. Nouronohar washes her hair, as she regains consciousness.

"Did I make you my nursemaid?" Daenerys asks.

"No, you made me your Hand. Just now, you've shown you can't look after yourself. The rest of us need you to function, if we want to win this war."

She slumps back in the bath and shuts her eyes. The maid finishes washing her, and she and Arya lift her out of the bath. After drying her, they dress her in a linen shift, and wrap her scarlet cloak around her, before propping her up on her bed. Arya tells Nouronohar to prepare some porridge. It tastes like shit, in her view, but it will help settle the Queen's stomach. The Queen swallows the mess manfully.

"My pipe!" she suddenly exclaims. Arya shakes her head.

"I've taken it, and the filth you smoke. I'll control how much you smoke from now on. I'd rather destroy the foul stuff, but the healers tell me that going without it completely would only make you worse."

The Queen looks set to argue, but then just sinks back into the bed. "Alright then, but give it to me when I need it." She closes her eyes, and drifts back to sleep, as Arya holds her in her arms.

Arya stays with the Queen for several days. During that time, she discusses the strategic situation with Grey Worm and Ser Brienne. She learns that Bar Emmon and several lords from the Crownlands marched home, in disgust at the massacre of the Vale Knights. There are now around fifteen thousand men in the camp, and neighbouring strongholds, more than sufficient to defend the Crownlands from attack, but not enough to mount an invasion of the Riverlands. She supervises the Queen closely, making sure she practices her walking and riding, and eats adequately, as she gradually recovers her wits and her strength.

"I know you loved Jon deeply, " she tells her one night, "but your behaviour has put us all in danger. Lady Hightower sent a raven before we left to say that half her lords won't fight for you. They have relatives in the Vale. Lord Gendry has only brought a couple of thousand to Kings Landing. You know he has more than enough trouble with his bannermen as it is. He may be the natural son of Robert Baratheon, but to many of them, he's just a blacksmith who was raised far above his station. This just makes it even harder for him to win their support.

"And the Dornish?"

"They don't care. You know what they like to do to their prisoners. In any case, they've got Mariah and Aegon to fight for. By the time I left, Prince Quentyn was approaching the city with five thousand spears and two thousand horse."

"I know what I did was very stupid. I was mad with grief. I let the common soldiers go free, and I suppose that only enraged the lords more. But, they deserved what they got. Nobody forced them to revolt. Jon, and you, and I worked so hard to rebuild the Seven Kingdoms after war, but your sister and Sweetrobin and her followers insisted on playing their game of thrones."
"It was stupid, but we have to make the best of it. I'd advise you to start by raising Prince Aegon to the Iron Throne with you. And, for the gods' sake, take down those crosses, and bury the bodies."

"Agreed." Then, the Queen starts giggling. "You know, if we spend any more time in the same bed, tongues will start wagging."

"Tongues already wag. I've turned down a dozen marriage proposals from various lords. Some of them assume it can only be because I favour pretty girls."

"Why have you never married?"

"Perhaps I will, one day. Right now, I find my work much more interesting than being the lady of a castle."

The pair of them set out for Kings Landing, a couple of days later, with two squadrons of horseguards and Dothraki outriders, leaving Grey Worm to supervise the campaign in the North. After five days, they reach Kings Landing, where Daenerys calls a council of war. Mariah is present, having just given birth to her second child, a daughter. She and Arya and the Queen spent the night before the meeting together, commiserating over Jon. Also present are Yara Greyjoy, Ser Davos, Lord Gendry, Prince Quentyn, and Gian Montefeltro, who commands the Tyroshi naval squadron that is serving with the Royal navy.

"The Braavosi have set sail" advises Montefeltro.

"At this time of year?" asks Ser Davos.

"They're confident sailors. But, they won't strike across the Sea until December, when the storm season is over. At the moment, they're sailing down the coast towards Pentos, where they'll rendezvous with the Pentoshi."

"Any idea where they're headed?" asks Arya.

"I would rule out Dorne. It has no ports of any use for warships. So, either Tarth or the Blackwater. Either way, I'd suggest moving the fleet to Driftmark and Dragonstone. That way, we can intercept them whichever way they're heading."

"I agree" says the Queen. "We have four squadrons; the ships of the Royal navy, commanded by Ser Davos, the Iron Fleet, commanded by her Grace, and the Tyroshi, commanded by Admiral Montefeltro. Then there is the Velaryons' squadron at Driftmark."

Yara gives a snort of laughter. "Her Grace! I'm not even a lady!"

"Well, whatever you are," replies Daenerys, smiling, "I'd like you to assume overall command. Ser Davos, please don't feel slighted, but Queen Yara has an unusual degree of experience in commanding fleets. She took a fleet to Meereen and back."

"And, got my arse handed to me by my uncle."

"Everyone suffers defeats. I have. The thing is to learn from them."

"Ser Davos," asks Yara, "there is a history of bad blood between my people and the mainlanders. Will they serve under my command?"

"Against a foreign enemy, yes, your......Grace?"
"Your views, Arya?" asks the Queen.

"We can't let them raid our coasts with impunity. I'd say we have no choice but to fight them at sea, your Grace."

And so the die is cast. In the event, the war will be decided at sea. At Driftmark Roads.

Chapter End Notes

1. The World of Ice and Fire shows that the Dornish have a record of being very brutal towards captives. In fairness to them, they have been subject to repeated invasions and intense racial prejudice from the rest of Westeros.

2. In A Feast for Crows, it was stated that Autumn is the storm season in the Narrow Sea.
Driftmark Roads - Part I

Chapter Summary

12th December AC 313 Driftmark Roads

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yara Greyjoy is ready to sail at Dawn. The wind is from the West. It is a fine December morning.

A fast galley reached Driftmark from the mainland, late yesterday afternoon, with news of the enemy. Beacons had signalled that the Braavosi fleet had been sighted sailing past Crab Island and Cracklaw point. She thinks they will try the passage between Driftmark and the mainland, rather than attempting to pass through the Gullet, but she is taking no chances. She has scouts ashore on both Driftmark and Dragonstone, to climb the hills and scan the sea at first light. The bulk of the fleet is stationed in the lee of Driftmark, although the Tyroshi squadron is docked at Dragonstone. She has taken one of the Royal Navy's dromonds, The Queen's Revenge, as her flagship. Her oars glide through the waves, as she rounds Driftmark Point to sail between the island and Dragonstone. The Iron Fleet has already passed through. Their ships are lighter than the Royal fleet, and will be on the left of the line of battle, closest to the mainland shore. Her lookout calls out from the crow's nest. Her own ship, Black Wind, now commanded by Ser Tristifer Botley, is signalling that sails have been seen on the Northern horizon. She signals for the Tyroshi to sail from Dragonstone. Their squadron will form the right wing of her line. She touches her axe for luck and utters a final prayer to the Drowned God, to bring her victory that day, or failing that, a good death. Cheering rings out across the fleet, as one by one, the ships sail between the two islands.

Admiral Loredan of Braavos is fifteen miles away as dawn breaks. His fleet is sailing in a long line, South West towards Duskendale and Kings Landing. The wind is against him, but his oarsmen are experienced, and surge through the water to the beat of the timekeepers' drums. His lookout reports ships on the horizon. It is unclear at this stage whether the enemy are offering battle, or escaping South Westwards. He signals for his ships to sail closer towards the coast, to cut off any attempt at retreat. He is a nervous man. Not because he fears death, but because his peoples' expectations are so high. It is many years since Braavos has suffered a defeat at sea. He does not wish to break that record. Nor does he underrate his enemy. The Ironborn are feared across the world for their prowess. The Tyroshi are doughty opponents. The Velaryons have centuries of naval experience. And the Royal Navy possesses one terrible advantage; wildfire. Released from siphons, or catapulted in clay pots, he knows what havoc it can wreak at sea. Not all the efforts of the Council's agents have ever prised the secret of its manufacture from the Alchemists' Guild. Over the course of the next hour, lookouts report that the enemy fleet is fanning outwards, not fleeing. It is to be battle then. He orders his ships to deploy from line to a crescent formation.

Ser Davos winces as he sees the steel buckets brought up on the deck of his ship, Warspite. Each is covered with a lid and is packed with sand, and contains a clay pot filled with wildfire, to be launched at the enemy. He remembers the death of his son, Matthos, to wildfire, all those years ago, on the Blackwater. Another son, Daven is currently serving as Captain of the Fleet, under Yara Greyjoy. Ser Davos is commanding the Royal navy, thirty eight dromonds. The Iron Fleet on the left of their line of battle number forty eight ships, the Tyroshi galleys on the right, forty two.
The Velaryons, twenty two strong, will form the reserve. One hundred and fifty ships, more than forty five thousand oarsmen, crew, soldiers and marines, one of the greatest fleets ever assembled by the Seven Kingdoms. He kneels with the rest of the crew, to receive a blessing from the ship's Septon, Hallayne. "The Seven are with us, my lord" says the Septon. "Today, we shall fill hell with the miserable souls of our enemies. Any of our men who falls will enter heaven as a martyr." Ser Davos doubts if the enemy sailors are any better or worse than his own men, but holds his tongue.

Gendry Baratheon stares at the approaching war fleet, from the bows of Black Wind. Thousands of Dornish and Stormlanders boarded the ships at Kings Landing, in readiness for the battle. They will fight alongside the Ironborn and marines. He suppresses laughter, as he imagines what he must look in his suit of gilded armour, bearing the Baratheon sigil, the stag. His helm even has a pair of antlers, in the manner of his ancestors. Him, a blacksmith! In truth, he had been frightened out of his life back in Winterfell, when the Queen first legitimised him, and then made him one of the Peers of the Realm. Gaining the respect of his proud Bannermen has been a struggle, ever since, made harder by the massacre of the Vale knights. They'd happily burn down a village and slaughter the inhabitants, but touch one of their own, and they react with outrage.

Not that he can ever forget the sight of Kings Landing after the Queen had reduced it to ash. For the hundredth time, he wonders if he did the right thing by swearing allegiance to her, but if it was good enough for Arya Stark to do so, then it was good enough for him. And, he owes it to the boy King, Aegon, to secure his rule.

Ser Tristifer joins him, and points to the approaching fleet "A thing of beauty wouldn't you say?"

"I wouldn't put it like that. I'm no sailor, but even I can see they outnumber us."

"All the more glory for us to win today, then. And, if we lose, then we'll feast with Drowned God."

Gendry grunts non-committally, before muttering "Little fucker!" as he spots the ship's boy carrying a load.

"Why, what's he done?"

"Came into my cabin just before first light, and offered to suck me off for a silver stag."

"Sounds like a fair price to me."

"You mean, you approve?"

"Why do you think the Ironborn are such good sailors? Rum, sodomy, and the lash keep my men in fighting trim. I try to avoid using the lash whenever I can, so that just leaves the other two."

Both men start snorting with laughter.

"Good luck, my lord."

"And you, Ser Tristifer."

On the Queen’s Revenge, Yara Greyjoy is making some rough mental calculations, as she watches her fleet, the line abreast rippling back and forth in sinuous curves, as the ships keep trying to adjust their positions, relative to her flagship at the centre. She has ordered that her ships need to be kept about one hundred paces a part, in order to avoid fouling each other, or destroying each other with wildfire. Advancing in two lines, with the Velaryons kept in the rear, she estimates that the line of battle is about four miles from end to end. Her lookouts have been making a count of the Braavosi fleet, and have reached two hundred and two ships. They will outflank her, but she intends to devastate the centre of their line, by destroying them with wildfire at the outset. After
that, the battle will turn on archery and cold steel on either side; and one other thing. A tactic which she proposed to Ser Tristifer Botley, and which she trusts he has now briefed the other captains with. Once battle has been joined, the second line will move up into the spaces between her own front line and that of the enemy.

Daven Seaworth joins her, offering her his spy-glass. "Five miles distant your Grace, by my calculations." She squints at the enemy fleet down the telescope and agrees.

Half an hour, and battle will be joined, Captain. May the Drowned God watch over you." "

"And, the Seven keep you safe, your Grace."

Admiral Loredan hopes that weight of numbers will win the battle. Running the gauntlet of wildfire will be a terrible ordeal. That morning, he ordered the bows of his ships to be fitted with padded cloth soaked with vinegar. It may reduce the impact of wildfire, but only by a little. No, as soon as get to within three hundred yards of the enemy, his oarsmen must redouble their speed, to close so fast with the enemy that it becomes too dangerous for them to use wildfire. Even so, he estimates that they will get at least one shot, before his own ships get close enough to rake them with archery and bolts from ballistae, mounted in his ships' bows. He notices that both wings are racing ahead of the rest of the fleet. That is dangerous. Sail too far forward, and they can be surrounded and picked off. He signals for them to fall back, and the line of battle flattens, as it draws ever closer to the enemy.

It is now Ten O'clock. In Kings Landing, the High Septon is conducting a fervent service for victory, in the restored Great Sept, at which the two Queens, the boy King, and Prince Quentyn are present. At Harrenhall, Sansa Stark and her paramour, Ser Addam Webber, are supervising the execution of Blackwood prisoners, following their defeat at the hands of the other River lords. In Braavos, Tyrion Lannister is currently enjoying the services of a most skilful young courtesan, Madame Cithrin Bel Sarcour is worrying about the growing influence of the Red Priests, and a young Meereenese noble is descending from his ship's gangplank, at the Ragman's Port.

Chapter End Notes

1. Wildfire is clearly based on Greek Fire, the most devastating weapon invented by the Eastern Empire. It was such a closely-guarded State secret that to this day no one has quite established how it was manufactured, but was likely based on petroleum or naphthha. Time and again, the Byzantines used it at sea with appalling consequences for their enemies. It was either released through a pressurised siphon, like a modern flamethrower, or catapulted in clay pots with burning tapers, and would burst into flame when the pots broke against enemy vessels. It could not be doused with water. The Arabs discovered that thick cloth, impregnated with vinegar, provided some limited protection.

2. In 16th century Europe, oarsmen were mostly chained galley slaves, prisoners of war, and condemned criminals. However, throughout most of history, they were recruited among the free poor, and it was considered an honourable occupation. I have assumed that the latter is the case here, even in the Tyrosh squadron.

3. According to Sir Winston Churchill, the British naval tradition was "rum, sodomy, and the lash."
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Warspite is in the front line, foam at her bows, closing fast with the enemy, no more than half a mile away. The wind is whipping at Ser Davos' back, filling the sails of his ship, and aiding his oarsmen. His heart swells as he looks across the line of battle, seeing the dragon banners of the Royal navy, the krakens of the Ironborn, and the sea horses of the Velaryons, streaming in the breeze. It is time. "Load" he orders. His men remove King Aerys' "fruits" from their buckets, light the tapers, and load two of them onto the catapults in the bows of the ship. "Draw". They turn the ratchets that draw back the bowstrings on each machine, and aim them at the oncoming warship. Four Hundred yards, now, almost effective artillery range. But, steady, steady.

Three hundred yards. "Loose". The catapults release both pots. One overshoots the oncoming ship, the other smashes against its deck, releasing a jet of green flame into the air. Within seconds, he can see flames racing across the deck and up the rigging. He can hear the frantic screams of sailors as they burn, or attempt to douse the fire. The ship is adrift, useless now in this fight, and can be ignored, but he will never cease to feel sympathy for the plight of burning sailors. Seconds later, bolts and arrows from the enemy vessels are sweeping across the decks of his own ship, piercing limbs, chests, throats. He sees three men at one of the catapults pinned to his ship's rails by a bolt from a ballista. He steals a quick glance at the enemy line. Right across it, ships are ablaze. One sight is especially awful. A siphon belches a stream of green flame which turns a Braavosi ship into a living torch. Then, a sound like thunder rolls across the sea, as ships on each front line smash into each other. He's almost knocked off his feet. Ropes with grappling hooks are flung across the railings of his ship, from an enemy vessel, and boarders leap on to her deck. The fight is brief and bloody, more like a brawl in a back alley than anything. He plunges in, smashing the hilt of his cutlass into the face of one attacker, before taking off the head of another with a backswing. Men are punching, bludgeoning, gouging each other, but two of his sailors cut through the ropes binding the two ships, and his oarsmen draw the Warspite backwards. He sees one enemy giant trying to jump the distance between the two ships, only to miss his footing and plunge into the sea, the weight of his armour dragging him to the bottom like a stone. By now, there are fewer than ten of the enemy left on board, gathered at the base of the mast. His men hack them down swiftly, no quarter given or asked.

Admiral Loredan grits his teeth as his ships go up in flames. He expected it, but it makes it no easier to bear. Over the course of ten minutes, perhaps one sixth of his fleet has been destroyed, but now is the time for vengeance. His own ships are catapulting rocks and bolts that smash into the enemy line, tearing through masts and decks, skewering enemy sailors. His archers keep up a withering fire on the enemy, cutting them down in droves. And he knows what he has to do. Cut the head off the snake and it dies. His ship steers straight for the Queen's Revenge, in the centre of the Royal navy. Three other galleys make for the same ship, as he intends to overwhelm the pirate Queen by sheer weight of numbers. String her up from her own yardarm, and the enemy's resistance will surely break. For a moment, he wonders if he should open the visor of his helmet to give orders, only for a bolt to bounce off it. In truth, orders are hardly necessary. All his men know what is expected of them, and this will be a bludgeoning match. His flagship reaches the left flank of Yara's and his men throw grappling irons over the rails, just as another of his galleys reaches her right. Soldiers and sailors pour over the gunwales on both sides.

"Hot work your Grace" laughs Daven Seaworth, as he and Yara plunge into the fray, just before a bearded giant takes his head off with a long sword. Yara buries her axe in the man's face, even as
Daven's torso falls to the deck. Time to mourn him later, as she dives into the fray. "Fucking whore" she hears a man scream behind her, just in time to duck the blow from his cutlass, before lunging forward, driving her dirk into his mouth with her left hand, and out the back of his head. She feels the ship shudder as a galley hits it from behind. She doesn't know it, but it is one of her own, and men pour from it to join in the fight. Increasingly, the sailors on both sides realise that the fight hinges on both flagship, as more galleys come up, and feed men into the fight. Yara slips and falls, sprawling. She realises that the decks are awash with blood, even as she rolls aside to avoid a club smashing into the deck where her head was. The enemy sailor raises the club again, planning to dash her brains out, snarling mouth filled with rotten teeth, only for a pike to burst through his chest. The grinning pikeman leans down to help Yara to her feet. "If we're still alive, come to me after the battle to claim your reward" she tells him, as they return to the fight.

Gendry scans the line of battle. All along it, ships are colliding with each other, sinking, burning. In places, the sea itself is aflame with the wildfire. Hundreds of men are in the water, clinging to spars and wreckage, some of them still fighting each other, even as they struggle to stay alive. Yet, on the left flank, the Ironborn seem strangely reluctant to engage with the enemy. Volleys of bolts and arrows sweep across each line, but the Northmen have not tried to close with the enemy. Indeed, they seem to be edging constantly towards the mainland shore, perhaps in an effort to outflank their opponents. The Braavosi, not wishing to be outflanked, are pulled with them. Gendry spots the danger, and runs to Ser Tristifer.

"There's a wide gap between us and the rest of the line, Ser. We must remain in line. or else the enemy will destroy our centre."

"Trust me in this, my Lord." By now, the gap between the Ironborn and the centre of their fleet has reached half a mile. A similar gap has opened between the enemy and the middle of their own line of battle. A sudden blast of the trumpet, and the Black Wind spins round, tearing back towards the flank of the enemy's centre, followed by half the Iron Fleet, leaving the Braavosi right wing in their wake. Ser Tristifer times his attack to perfection, using his ship's ram to sheer off one of the rows of oars of the first of the enemy galleys. Gendry winces as he imagines the oars smashing into the backs and chests of the oarsmen. With the wind now behind them, Ser Tristifer and the Ironborn catch the Braavosi ships at a serious disadvantage, tearing a hole through the middle of their line, withering them with bolts, arrows, and wildfire, and taking a string of prizes. Gendry never has the chance to distinguish himself in combat. By the time he boards an enemy galley, half the crew are already dead, and the rest surrender without a fight.

It is now that Admiral Loredan takes the decision that will haunt him for the rest of his life. His numbers are still at least equal to those of the enemy, and his right and left wings are mostly intact, even if the centre is crumbling. Does he fight to the bitter end, in the hope of snatching a victory, or accept that the battle is lost, and save the bulk of the fleet? He decides on the latter course, and signals the retreat. All across the line, his ships are disengaging, and turning tail. In the event, two thirds of his fleet will make it back to Braavos. Inevitably, he is put on trial. He will be acquitted of cowardice, but found guilty of failing to do his utmost to engage the enemy, and dismissed from the service in disgrace.

Ser Davos watches in satisfaction as the Braavosi flee the battle. His own men are exhausted, and there is no question of pursuit. It is no rout, but a real victory nonetheless. Suddenly he feels a punch in his guts. Then a wave of agony. A crossbow bolt has penetrated his mail. He collapses to his deck, knowing that the wound is mortal. As he is carried down to the ship's surgeon in the cockpit, he feels two emotions. Relief that it happened too late to affect the battle's outcome; sadness that we will never get the chance to sail into Kings Landing's harbour in triumph. Both he and Daven will receive State funerals in the Great Sept, when the fleet returns home.
Yara will spend the night after the battle getting drunk with the surviving captains, as they celebrate victory, and hold a wake for the dead. Afterwards, she cries for Ser Davos and Daven. The Drowned God is cruel indeed, to take a father and his son. She promises herself to visit his widow in person, to tell her that both men died as heroes.

Chapter End Notes

1. In describing a battle at sea between fleets of galleys, I have found Roger Crowley's "Empires of the Sea" invaluable. I have taken Ser Tristifer Botley's tactic from that used by the Ottoman Admiral Uluch Ali, at the battle of Lepanto. He could "make his galley do what a rider can do with a well-trained horse." Had the other Ottoman admirals matched his seamanship, they would have won the battle.

2. "King Aerys' fruits" is the nickname given to pots of wildfire.

3. Failure to do his utmost to engage the enemy was the charge that the unfortunate Admiral Byng was convicted of, and shot for, in 1759. Fortunately for Loredan, the Braavosi are a bit more merciful. Byng's descendants hold a memorial service for him every year, in the Anglican church in Potters Bar, and are still seeking a pardon.
Madame Cithrin has grown increasingly worried in recent weeks. The progress of the war is one source of worry. The destruction of the army of the Vale at Queen Alysanne's Cross was an unexpected disaster. Although a banker by profession, she has studied military matters quite extensively during her career, a sensible endeavour, given that the Iron Bank prefers to pick winners. Indeed, she was the only senior member of the Bank to conclude that Daenerys would defeat her opponents in the East, and that they ought to fund her. All of this unpleasantness could have been avoided had her colleagues taken her advice. She had spoken at length to military experts who assured her that the Vale knights had a fearsome military reputation. It turned out that their reputation was out of date. Even worse was the recent naval defeat off Driftmark. Like any citizen of the Republic, she took Braavosi naval supremacy for granted. Thankfully, enough ships had returned to protect the city and coasts, and the Arsenal could produce a new war galley every two days, but the humiliation was keenly felt. And, while it's easy enough to replace lost ships, replacing skilled sailors and oarsmen is another matter. Worse, other free cities will be tempted to seize trade from the Serene Republic, if they think it cannot defend shipping routes. However, there is a much worse threat to the Republic than any military defeat. The Red Priests.

Like most of her class, she regards religion as nothing more than flim flam and superstition. No educated person could believe legends about Empresses who lived for a thousand years, or dead men riding through the stars. But, ridiculous as such beliefs are, she recognises their value in keeping the lower orders docile. Promise them rewards in the life to come, and the less likely they are to raise their hands against their betters. She rather respects the Dragon Queen's skill in spreading propaganda about defeating the Army of the Dead at Winterfell. Obviously, it was a battle against a tribe of wildlings. But, pretending it was a cosmic battle to save the world would do wonders to entrench support for her among the Smallfolk.

Yes, that is a woman to admire. Why did I never enter her service? Women have risen to the highest levels of power under her reign.

Still, if her admiration for the Dragon Queen is that of one highly intelligent woman for another, the Red Priests view things very differently. They see her as Azor Ahai reborn, come to purge the world of the followers of Druj, the Lie. The fact that she herself is a pagan, in their eyes, seems not to worry them; they say that the Lord of Light chooses even the righteous among the pagans to serve him. The new Red Priestess in the city, Kinvara is the worst. A dangerous fanatic who has the gall to preach that the war against Daenerys is sinful. That is treason. The Red God now has thousands of followers in the city and surrounding towns. What if they were to rise in rebellion? It occurs to her, for the first time, that religion might overturn the rule of the elite of Braavos. She shudders as she remembers the nightmare she suffered three nights ago. Of ashes falling over a ruined city; of herself, and the other noblewomen, chained to wooden posts surrounded by kindling, waiting for the Red God's fires to be lit; of the Sealord writhing on a stake that protrudes
from his mouth, his councillors kneeling with their hands bound, as fresh stakes are sharpened for
them; of a world in flames, as battle-maddened legions of the Red God, bearing the Targaryens'
dragon banners, set it ablaze.

She has an appointment with the Sealord, and is summoned into his office. He looks tired, worried,
as indeed he should be. "It appears that we misjudged our enemies" he begins.

"And our allies. The knights of the Vale were cut to pieces. By all accounts, Lord Arryn was
completely outclassed. At least King Jon was killed, and the Dragon Queen's revenge alienated
many of her supporters. Without that, she'd have overrun the Vale and be besieging Riverrun by
now."

"The war at sea is what worries me. I'm the first Sea Lord in over forty years to have suffered a
naval defeat. Myr and Lys will likely turn on us, and Volantis is closed to our commerce. My
enemies in the Senate want my head. They may get it."

"We're still a great power at sea."

"We can defend our waters. For the time being, we cannot project our power beyond them."

"There's another threat."

"I know. I know. The Red priests. I also know what you're going to suggest, serving them fire and
blood. I agree we must. But, we can't fight a war at home and abroad at the same time."

"Then, it's time to cut our losses. Much as I would prefer to see Sansa Stark ruling the Seven
Kingdoms, or at any rate a part of them, the survival of the Republic is our first priority."

"Are you suggesting that we cut her loose? That would be a huge blow to our standing."

"I'm suggesting we at least explore peace with Kings Landing. We can bring our allies into line, I'm
sure. They need the gold of the Iron Bank to keep fighting. We can try to find a face-saving
compromise for them."

"Why would the Dragon Queen want peace when she's won two victories?"

"Two victories aren't a war. Half her lords are still opposed to her or are sitting on the fence."

"Then I shall recommend that the Council send you as an envoy to Kings Landing."

"Me? I think the Dragon Queen and Arya Stark might hang me from the gate of the Red Keep, the
moment I set foot there. I did not depart on good terms."

"A risk which I'm sure you will run, for the sake of the Republic. Valar Morghulis, Madame
Cithrin. I know of no one who matches your skill as a negotiator."

"Valar Doeharis, your Excellency. If the Council insists, then I shall make arrangements for my
departure."

Elsewhere in the city, a wicked little imp is completing his biography of the Dragon Queen.

"Her Satanic Majesty. The Life and Crimes of Daenerys Targaryen."

"He reviews some of his favourite passages."
“And, now that she is mistress of the world she indulges the furious emotions of her temper, at a
time when they are disgraceful to herself, and fatal to the defenceless objects of her displeasure. In
the government of her household, or of her empire, slight, or even imaginary, offences - a hasty
word, a casual omission, an involuntary delay - are chastised by a sentence of immediate death.
The expressions which issue the most readily from the mouth of the Queen are “Burn him alive”,
“strike his head from his shoulders”, “let him be beaten with clubs till he expires”. She rides a
dragon, Drogon by a name, a fell beast with an insatiable appetite for human flesh. Often, she will
have victims driven to this creature by her eunuchs, armed with long spears, (including a most holy
Septa, who had earnestly beseeched her to repent her sins), and this fiend will tear them apart,
while she amuses her eyes with the spectacle of their deaths, gratifying herself with their screams
and cries of agony.”

“As to her lusts, I have it on good authority that even as a young girl, she delighted to play the
harlot to her brother, Viserys, in exile. And, though she was still too young to enjoy intercourse like
a woman, yet she would pleasure him with her mouth and fingers, and encourage him to train her
in the arts of concubinage. And, having married the Dothraki Khal, Drogo, to obtain an army, the
pair continued to indulge their illicit passion, until the proud barbarian, enraged at having been
made a cuckold by the brother to his wife, slew him with a pot of molten gold. In turn, she
murdered her husband, shortly thereafter.”

“She is wont to complain to members of her Court that nature has provided her with but three
orifices for pleasure, and to wish that she had a further opening between her breasts, that she
might contrive a novel form of intercourse there. Many a time, she will summon palace guards,
Gold Cloaks, even servants, to her bedchamber, young men at the peak of their powers and with a
passion for fornication. And there she will let them take her, sometimes two or three at a time, as
though she were a common strumpet, while Princess Mariah, Lady Arya, and other ladies of the
court watch, calling out encouragement, and touching themselves and each other in lewd and
lascivious ways. “

“Sometimes, she and her ladies will sally forth from the palace at night, and visit the lowest
brothels in the city. And, there the wench will exhibit herself to those dregs of humanity who haunt
such venues, eagerly displaying to all comers those parts which ought to remain decently covered,
before then complying with the most shameless demands on her body. Exhausted, she returns to
her bedchamber, reeking of her fornications. The gods, however, are not mocked. Her excesses
have rendered her incapable of bearing children. And that is well, for such foul fruit as might grow
in her diseased womb could not fail to be an enemy to Mankind.”

He is interrupted by the arrival of a visitor. It has taken years to arrange this meeting, through
contacts formed when he served as Hand in Meereen, but revenge is always a dish best served
cold. Not all of the native elite of Meereen were destroyed by the Dragon Queen. Some of them
switched sides, once they realised her rule was there to stay, the Shavepates, they named
themselves. Others only pretended to do so. He joins him in the drawing room, and shares a flagon
of wine.

She ought to have killed every mother's son of them. A curious oversight, but it may prove fatal.
Curious oversights often do. For that matter, she should have killed me.

He informs the visitor that he will arrange for a smuggler to take him to Gulltown, so that in due
course, he can meet Lady Sansa. He also has a letter for her, written in her mother's cypher,
detailing the man's history and background, and how he may be of assistance to her.
1. The passages in Tyrion's biography of Daenerys are based on passages from Gibbon, Procopius, and Juvenal. Unfortunately, it has been very common throughout history for powerful women to be depicted as sexually depraved.

2. In the novel, A Game of Thrones, Catelyn and her sister used their own private cypher to communicate with each other.

3. I have renamed Tyrion's biography of Daenerys, adopting the term that Dumb and Dumber used to describe her in the script for Season 8, Episode 6. No wonder Emilia Clarke was devastated when she read through the script for the first time. The ending of what had been a great series was a great, steaming, pile of faeces.
The Blessings of Peace

Chapter Summary

Kings Landing and Riverrun, 27th February AC 314

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The two Queens, Daenerys and Mariah, are seated on ivory thrones in the audience chamber of the Red Keep. Both wear matching porphyry robes and crowns of iron and rubies, showing that they hold equal status within the Seven Kingdoms; Daenerys in her own right, Mariah as Regent for her son, King Aegon VI.

"Can you give me one good reason why I should allow you to live?" Daenerys asks the Braavosi envoy. "King Jon expelled you in disgrace, from the Seven Kingdoms, after he learned that you were consorting with pirates. Your country launched an unprovoked attack on mine, in alliance with traitors. We have lost King Jon, Ser Davos Seaworth, and thousands of good men. Tell me why I should not crucify your leaders, burn your city to the ground, and plough the remains with salt."

"Your Graces" replies Madame Cithrin. "Please accept my most sincere condolences for the losses you have suffered. As to why I should live, I believe most sincerely, that peace is in the best interests of both our nations. I have full authority from the Sealord and Council of Six to negotiate the terms of such a peace."

"We did not break the peace. You did."

"With the utmost respect, your Graces, my people have long held legitimate grievances against your government. War was only declared as a last resort, after all other means had been exhausted."

"A last resort? You demanded that I go into exile, to a place of your choosing, no doubt to find a quick grave at the hands of one your assassins."

"Including such a demand was a grievous error on the part of my government, your Grace, one that I argued long and hard against putting forward. I am authorised to offer concessions to your Graces."

Queen Mariah speaks for the first time. "Then perhaps you are not wasting our time, after all. You may put your proposals to the Small Council in due course. In the meantime, you will be assigned quarters in the palace. You are not a prisoner, your Excellency, but you are not free to leave."

Cithrin curtsies, and guards escort her from the chamber.

"Gods, Mariah, I feel as if I need a bath after speaking to that woman. Was everything she said a lie, or just the majority of it?"

"Jon used to feel the same way about her. But, I think we should at least hear her out. Otherwise, I fear we may have reached a stalemate. We can keep our enemies out of the South, but we'll struggle to retake the three rebel kingdoms. And, Braavos plainly wants to get out of this war."
"Would that I could fly Drogon again and rain fire on our enemies! But, wishes aren't fishes"

"How is he?"

"Well enough. But life in the Dragonpit must be a dull thing, compared to soaring through the skies. A dragon is fire made flesh. He'll far outlive me of course. When I'm gone, Aegon should ride him. We should let them get to know each other. Or maybe your daughter will ride him. I'm glad you named her Elia. I'm sorry to say that my brother treated his wife shamefully. When I was a girl, I thought it was romantic that he and Lyanna eloped together. Now, I don't know what they were thinking. They destroyed themselves, my father, Lyanna's father, and brother, and Elia and her children "

"Rhaegar did behave badly. But, I've long thought that the the Starks, Tullys, Baratheons, and Arryns were poised to strike against your father regardless. Why else would they have stopped marrying their children to their Bannermen, except to forge a great alliance between their Houses. And, who would they have forged it against except your family? They had no foreign enemies to threaten them. Many members of your family have had prophetic dreams and visions. Perhaps Rhaegar did, and foresaw that he would need another son to continue the line. Without Jon, you would have been the last Targaryen. All your work would have been in vain."

Mariah rises, and assists Daenerys to do so. "I'm very lucky that Jon married you," she says, as they walk from the room, Mariah lending her arm to the other Queen. "When I'm gone, the Seven Kingdoms will be in safe hands, until your son comes of age."

"I hope you'll still be around to see it."

"Unlikely. I know the resin I smoke is harming me. But, I can't function without it."

They both descend into the main courtyard of the palace, to a round of cheers from waiting guardsmen and officials. They both embrace Yara Greyjoy, before climbing into a litter, which will take them to the Great Sept. A service of thanksgiving is due to be held, to celebrate the victory at sea. Daenerys wonders whether they ought to have made Madame Cithrin attend.

The mood is a good deal less pleasant at Riverrun.

"My lord, you have rejected my offer to spare your life, upon condition that you confess your treason, and perform homage. I, Sansa of House Stark, Queen in the North, Queen of the Vale and the Riverlands, therefore sentence you to die. If you have any last words, now is the time". Lord Blackwood kneels at the headsman's block, his hands tied behind his back.

"Lady Stark, I thank you for granting me an honourable death, but you are not, and never have been my Queen. You have burned my villages and slaughtered my people. I am no traitor, but rather a loyal subject to their Graces, Aegon and Daenerys Targaryen."

Sansa nods to the headsman. Although she remembers her father's saying that the person who passes the sentence should wield the sword, a headsman's blade is far too heavy for her to wield effectively.

The headsman bows before the condemned prisoner. "Forgive me, my lord," he says, as is customary.

"I forgive you, son. Do your duty."
The blade flashes through the air, and the man's head is taken with one blow.

Sansa returns to her solar, along with Lord Edmure and Lady Roslyn. Maester Vyman has unwelcome news for them. "Your Grace, my Lord and Lady, our allies of Braavos are seeking a way out of this war."

"They're betraying us?" says Lady Roslyn.

"They say they will make no peace separately from us. But, they have advised us to seek peace. I suppose they take the view that they would obtain worse terms if they were to withdraw unilaterally from the war. It is years since their war fleet has been defeated. I suspect it has shaken them deeply. And, there are rumours of internal unrest."

"The snakes! We fight on, and we fight to win!" replies Sansa. "We have crushed Lord Blackwood, and driven the Dragon Queen's officials from the Riverlands."

"Your Grace, how long do you think we can continue fighting, if Braavos stops funding us?"

"Your Bannermen acclaimed me Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, Uncle, at this very castle. Will they now switch sides?"

"My dear, you'll recall very well that you promised them financial rewards. So far, we have given them those financial rewards, courtesy of the Iron Bank. But, they're weather vanes. If the supply of gold dries up, some of them will think of making their own peace with Kings Landing. They may want you to wear a crown, but they'll want to save their own skins a good deal more than that."

"If delivering you, me, and Edmure up for execution is the price for retaining their own lands, many of them will happily pay it" comments Lady Roslyn.

"But, the Dragon Queen hates me. She's always hated me, and now I've tried to claim her crown. I'm simply a traitor in her eyes. If I sue for peace, she'll burn me alive. No, there can be no peace."

"If I may advise your Grace," comments Vyman "I believe that the chances of reaching a settlement with Kings Landing are good. Everyone knows that the Dragon Queen is ailing. Your own sister is now Hand, and Mariah Martell has two infant children to look after. I believe that they would both wish to end this war. Few rulers wish to fight and internal and external enemy at the same time. We still have much to bargain with. We control the Riverlands and the Vale still, despite their losses. We have thousands of experienced soldiers under arms. Lord Brandon continues to hold Winterfell. But, I fear that our strategic position will only deteriorate, the longer we fight on. Many lords were disgusted by the butchery of the Vale Knights, but in the end, many of them will want to be on the stronger side. Our enemies' resources are ultimately stronger than our own."

"I shall need time to think about this. Please leave me."

Lord and Lady Tully leave. Vyman remains, "Your Grace, I have received a further communication, from our friend in Braavos. It is written in your own cypher. I believe it may have some bearing on the decision which you take. The message was delivered by a Meereenese nobleman, who arrived this morning. He has been given quarters appropriate to his rank."

Sansa reads through the letter. The news it contains makes her feel as if has climbed into a warm bath, such is her feeling of relief. She has been handed a weapon to destroy the horselord's slut once and for all. She will offer peace. As her mother taught her, all those years ago The fool strikes without thinking. The wise woman smiles, and nods, and curtsies. And then, she strikes."
1. My own view is that a far less paranoid ruler than Aerys II would have been intensely worried to see the families of Lords Paramount intermarrying with each other. Prior to that, they tended to intermarry with their own bannermen or with the royal family. It's hard to see this as anything other than an alliance aimed at the Targaryens. I can't be certain, but I suspect that Aegon V's social reforms, which were bitterly opposed by the nobility, had done a lot to undermine support for the dynasty among the nobles. Although the reforms were reversed by Aerys II and Lord Tywin, the King's increasingly erratic behaviour probably convinced a lot of people that a change of dynasty was needed.

2. In medieval England, it was the custom for an executioner to seek forgiveness from a condemned man or woman of rank, prior to beheading them. The intention was to show that the executioner bore no personal malice towards the victim, and if the victim said they forgave their executioner, it would aid their chances of salvation in the next world. It's reminiscent of the scene in The Godfather where Tessio tells Tom Hagen to tell Michael Corleone that his attempt to kill him was nothing personal.

3. Sansa was thrilled when the River Lords acclaimed her Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, but she has not formally claimed that title yet. She has claimed the titles Queen in the North, Queen of the Vale, and Queen of the Riverlands.
Death Comes to Dragonstone

Chapter Summary

Dragonstone 1st May AC 314.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Acolyte rises before dawn, to begin his work. He treads the stone-flagged corridors, carrying a small oil lamp, until he reaches the great wooden doors that give entrance to the Royal Sept. He fumbles with his set of keys, eventually finding the one that fits this lock. He pushes the doors open, before walking into the Sept. Here and there, candles are burning, protected by glass, as offerings to the Seven. He approaches the altar, and lights the two great candles, at either end of the altar, and which now illuminate the chancel. He enters Queen Rhaella's chapel, newly decorated, to light the altar candles. The mother of Daenerys was by all accounts a gentle and kind-hearted lady; for all her abilities, the same cannot be said of her daughter. However, it is not for the likes of him to judge those whom the Seven have appointed to rule the Seven Kingdoms. He kneels and says a quick prayer for the health and prosperity of the royal family.

On leaving the chapel, he encounters Queen Daenerys and her handmaiden in person, and falls to his knees immediately. This is not the first time they have met. She comes to the Sept quite regularly at daybreak. She gestures to him to rise, before entering the Queen Rhaella's chapel herself. As he leaves the Sept, he notes that her bodyguards remain at the doors.

Daenerys has never been especially religious. She accepts that there must be gods, but she has never established which ones are true and which ones are false. Of course, she attends regular services, as any ruler of the Seven Kingdoms must, in order to retain the respect of the Faith. She stares up at the dazzling mosaic above the altar, depicting the Mother receiving Queen Rhaella into Heaven. If there is a Heaven, she has no doubt that her mother does reside there, and that the crowned beast who was her father does not. It had hurt her, as a girl, to learn what manner of man he was. Circumstances had then conspired to ensure that she would turn out to be even worse than he was. And, she had enjoyed it all, conquering, destroying her enemies, bringing fire and blood to all those who defied her. She knows all too well that she has waded through blood, in her quest to become the ruler of half the World. She has sent men and women into the dark places of the earth, to be questioned by professionals with their tools, seldom to return. Worse, when in the mood, she has taken part in such questioning, . She has sacked cities, burned palaces, destroyed the homes and hopes of thousands. Had I died at Volantis, a million people would have cheered

Since she suffered her injuries, such enjoyment has faded to be replaced with a growing sense of guilt. Indeed, for the first time in her life, she recently confessed her sins to the High Septon in Kings Landing. He reassured her that all rulers have to do cruel things for the good of their people, but she suspects that he is simply telling her what she wants to hear. The man is a politician, first and foremost. She lights a candle for her mother, and then leaves the chapel, to break her fast with Mariah Martell, Aegon, and Prince Quentyn. Over wine, with cakes and bread with honey, they discuss the progress of the talks with Madam Cithrin and the rebels. In return for the rebels coming to negotiate in Dragonstone, under safe conduct, Arya and Gendry Baratheon
had agreed to serve as hostages in Riverrun. Daenerys has been content to leave the negotiations, over the past month, to Mariah, Prince Quentyn, Yara Greyjoy, and Gian Moltefeltrro, representing Tyrosh. The thought of having to sit across the table from Madame Cithrin, Sansa Stark, Maester Wolkan, Edmure Tully, and Lady Arryn of Gulltown turns her stomach. Nor has she had much practice at negotiation; dragonlords rarely have to negotiate.

"I believe we're approaching a final settlement" comments Mariah.

"And that is?"

"Braavos will pay an indemnity to the Seven Kingdoms, the Iron Islands, and Tyrosh for losses suffered in the war, and waive the Iron Bank's claim for compensation for war damage when Kings Landing fell?"

"How very generous of them? And in return?"

"Braavosi merchants and the Iron Bank will be free to operate anywhere within the Seven Kingdoms, Volantis, and Meereen."

"And the traitors?"

"They will drop their claim to independence, in return for a full Royal Pardon, and concessions on export duties. To be honest, I think these are good terms from our point of view. The Seven Kingdoms remain united under their rightful sovereigns, and the Braavosi are made to eat humble pie."

"So, why does it feel like a defeat?"

"It's Jon, isn't it?" asks Prince Quentyn, an attractive brown-faced young man." He sighs. " No indemnity will bring him back to life, I know that. I'd love nothing more than to burn them alive, but we'd have to keep fighting for years to achieve that."

"I'll never forgive them," Mariah takes Dany's hand in her own. "But, my cousin is right."

"It's not just Jon" she replies. "Think of honest, loyal, Ser Davos, and his son. Thousands of good men. It sticks in my throat to think that money can buy their way out of trouble......but I'll ratify the agreement. For the sake of this young man, if nothing else. " She smiles at Aegon. "When we get back to Kings Landing, I'll take you to meet Drogon. You might ride him one day."

The boy beams with pleasure.

After breakfast, she retires to her study, to work on state papers, while the peace talks continue in the Painted Chamber. She muses more about the past. While she has committed some awful acts (and she now accepts the truth of Jon's comment all those years ago, that she searched for excuses for her actions, among ancient jurists and philosophers) there are still things to weigh in the balance. However selfish her motives may have been, she did free millions of slaves, and save the world from the Dead. She has kept the nobles in check, both here and in the East, suppressed brigands and pirates, and promoted trade. Taxes in the Seven Kingdoms are lower than they have been for decades. Some of her realms have not been so well-governed in centuries. A bad woman but a good Queen. That was Arya's verdict all those years ago, and she hopes that is how she will be remembered. After completing her work, she retires to her dressing room, where Nouronohar dresses her in a black and silver gown. She is hosting a delegation of Kings Landing merchants for lunch, in the Small Refectory.

As she expects, the lunch is a bore. Most of the merchants she talks to are angling for monopolies,
or other commercial concessions. No doubt, one of her steward's palms has been well-greased to get a place at the event. Still, she endures it all with a good grace, eventually excusing herself after a couple of hours. She retires to her solar, where she and Nouronohar spend the afternoon indulging King Aegon, while his mother remains locked in negotiations. In the evening, they will dine together, and discuss the course of the day's negotiations.

**Three Days Later**

The Acolyte is up before daybreak as usual. After lighting the altar candles, he descends into the cellar of the Sept, through a door behind the choir. He checks the supplies of altar wine, bread, and holy oil. He climbs the steps, and enters the chancel, prior to leaving the Sept. Then he remembers, he has to count the remaining candles. He returns to his work. On his return to the cellar door, he hears voices, raised in anger, coming from Queen Rhaella's Chapel. He hesitates, torn between curiosity, and fear. Fear wins out, and he remains hidden behind the door, which is slightly ajar. He will, however, be able to give a description of those who leave the Sept, subsequently.

Daenerys stands before the altar in Queen Rhaella's chapel, lost in thought. And then she hears the door of the Sept close, and the key turn in the lock behind her. She hears footsteps, slow and steady. In a second, she grasps what is happening. She is nervous, but not afraid. All of her life, she has been running before assassins. She knows that sooner or later, they will outrun her. It occurs to her that her own guards must have been suborned. They are under orders to allow no one into the Sept, when she is praying in her mother's chapel. With the doors closed, there is little point in calling for help, especially at this hour.

"You've used too much gold leaf" she hears Sansa explain. "It looks vulgar; more what you'd expect from the manse of a self-made merchant, rather than the palace of a Queen." Daenerys turns to face her. With her is a man she recognises as Ser Addam Webber, two rough-looking men in black leather, who cannot mean well, and a fourth man in a hooded cloak. His clothing appears Meereenese.

"I never had the good fortune to be taught by a Maester." A pause. "But, I doubt if you are here to discuss fine art. Why are you doing this?"

Sansa looks surprised at the question. "I've hated you, from the very beginning. You seduced my brother and made him your puppet. You corrupted my sister, and made her your torturer. You broke up my whole family. You're a murderer of innocents. The world will be a better place without you."

"I daresay it will. But that's not what this is really about is it? I've always been the foreign whore who stole your crown. Isn't that right?" Sansa doesn't answer.

"I understand that you hate me. I've always known that. But, this is stupid. When I'm found dead, who will they blame but you? " She glances at the others. "As for you, she won't let you live after this. She can't. It's far too dangerous."

Sansa smiles. "I told them you'd say that. But, it doesn't matter. The man who kills you will take his own life, once he's taken yours."

"An unusual assassin." The Meereenese steps forward, and removes his hood. "Do you remember me, your Magnificence? I remember you. My mother was raped, and murdered by her own slaves. They killed my father and my brother. I went to you for justice. You took their side."

"I do remember, now. You rushed me, and I let you go free. You know as well as I do that I
proclaimed an amnesty all round, else the whole city would have been full of vendettas."

"Your amnesty didn't stop you nailing up a hundred and sixty three of my people. I've dreamed of justice since that day"

"And you'll take your own life? You have so much more to live for than that."

"We waste time" snaps Sansa. "I'll tell you one thing for your comfort, before you go. When your killer's discovered, they'll find all kinds of compromising letters in the Braavosi diplomatic cypher in the pocket of his cloak. You have the Imp to thank for that suggestion. They'll think that Braavos did this, and resume the war. Madame Cithrin will be in for quite a lively time, shortly, I imagine. I, of course, will join the general chorus of horror at this sacrilege."

"And war suits you better. It seems I made a mistake to allow the Imp to live. You too, for that matter."

"If it's any consolation to you, you're right. Make an end" she instructs the Meerenese.

There is nowhere to flee to. Daenery shuts her eyes, and waits for the blade in her heart. The blow is almost painless.

Mercy has always been my weakness. It will be the death of me one day she thinks, as her soul flees far away.

Chapter End Notes

1. That was a hard chapter to write. I wrote Daenerys as a villain in this story, but (I hope) an engaging and interesting villain.

I would add that unlike D & D, I don't consider Daenerys to be a villain at all, either as depicted in the show (prior to Season 8, Episode 5) or in the books. She is a heroine, albeit one with flaws, such as a streak of self-righteous cruelty and arrogance. Against that, she is brave, empathetic towards victims of injustice, and loyal to her followers. Morally, I'd see her as being on a par with King David in the Old Testament.

I regard D & D's portrayal of her at the end of the series as a travesty, and a slap in the face for most viewers. In the script for Episode 6, which they've just published, she is described as "Her Satanic Majesty." Yes. The Devil. Even if she is not literally the Devil, the implication is that she is as evil and irredeemable as the Devil. That's right. The woman who abandoned her military campaign to march North to save the world, and who set slaves free in the East, while trying to compromise with their Masters. I think it's must be about 150 years since anyone seriously advanced the proposition that abolitionism is evil. But D & D have done just that.

I'm tempted to write a fic in which Drogon forcibly sodomises the pair of them.

Anyway, despite her death, Dany's story is not quite finished in this fic. But, it's not a resurrection fic.

2. In A Dance with Dragons, Daenerys I, Daenerys was approached by a teenage
Meereenese noble whose family was murdered by the household slaves. She rejected his request that they be punished, and he tried to assault her, an attack she forgave.


Lady Sansa's Confession

Chapter Summary

4th May AC 314 Dragonstone

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Later in the morning, Queen Mariah summons Sansa to the Painted Chamber, along with her colleagues and Madame Cithrin. When she enters, the Queen wastes no time informing them of the dreadful news.

"Her Grace, Queen Daenerys, has been murdered in the Royal Sept. Her killer was found with her. We understand that he took his own life. Madame Cithrin, I have reason to believe that you were party to the murder. I am therefore placing you under arrest. You will be conducted to the Undercroft for questioning."

"I'm completely innocent!" she protests. "My government wants peace. Murdering the Queen is the last thing I'd do! And, remember, your Grace, I am a diplomat. I have immunity."

"Where such customs hold, it is the practice for envoys to refrain from murdering their hosts." Guards escort Madame Cithrin, still protesting her innocence, from the room.

"Believe me" says Mariah. "If anyone else in this room was party to the murder, they will wish they had never been born." She stares directly at Sansa.

"Your Grace. I bore no love for the Queen, as you well know. But that I would stoop to murder, in a Sept of all places.........I hope you would never think so ill of me." Mariah's gaze softens. She has judged her words well "May I ask why the Queen's bodyguards failed to protect her?"

"They have fled. Presumably, they betrayed her."

I should think they're on the seabed by now. Petyr Baelish taught me never to leave loose ends untied

The guards have been offered a huge amount of gold, and a fast ship to the East, like Ser Dontos Hollard. Instead, they'll get a one way trip to the bottom of the sea; with weights attached. It's the only way to deal with traitors. Daenerys would surely agree.

"Our negotiations will resume, once the Queen's funeral has taken place."

"Of course, your Grace," replies Edmure Tully. Some chance.

Sansa is confident that Madame Cithrin will be executed and that Braavos will resume the war. The Queen will have no option but to let her and the others depart, if her sister and Gendry are to return from Riverrun. She will get her crown, if she persists. She realises that her parents would be disgusted if they could see what manner of woman she had grown into. But, her parents' honour got them killed.
Later, she enjoys an excellent lunch in her chambers. She indulges herself with a large flagon of wine, and relives the events in the Sept. She feels nothing but satisfaction as she remembers Daenerys falling at her feet. Hopefully, the bitch is screaming in hell, at this very moment. She had rather hoped that the Queen would beg for her life, at the last, but one can’t have everything. She is in fact, slightly drunk, when they come for her.

"What is this? " she demands, as guards enter her chambers. "You are to be taken for questioning, my Lady." replies the officer in charge. "I am a Peer of the Realm, protected by safe conduct. Get out of my chambers, at once!" "It will be better for you, if you don’t make a fuss, my Lady. I can have you brought to the Undercroft in chains, if you force me to."

The Undercroft. Sansa realises that the game is lost, but she will still play it to the bitter end. She accompanies the guards as she is led through the castle, and taken down several flights of stairs. She is led down a dank passage, to a heavy door, studded with iron. The officer knocks three times, and it is opened. She is led into a large dimly lit chamber, damp, and cold. Seated at a table are the Queen Regent, Prince Quentyn, and Yara Greyjoy. Standing by the walls are her uncle, Edmure, Maester Wolkan, and Lady Arryn. Tied to a chair in the centre of the room is Madam Cithrin, who looks terrified. As well she might. On a small table before her is set an array of instruments; blades, needles, and other items whose purpose is horribly obscure. Fortunately, they have only been displayed to Madame Cithrin, so far. There are at least a score of armed guards in the chamber, as well as a young man in the robes of an Acolyte of the Faith. There are unpleasant sounds, coming from behind a small door, to the right. Sansa is brought before Mariah.

She turns to the Acolyte. "Do you recognise this Lady?"

"I do, your Grace," he replies.

"Please explain the circumstances in which you saw her."

"Your Grace, I was working in the cellar, beneath the royal Sept. I heard raised voices coming from Queen Rhaella’s chapel. I suspected something was wrong, but I’m afraid I was a coward. I hid behind the door to the cellar. But, I saw this Lady emerge from the chapel, with three men. When I entered the chapel, I saw that the Queen had been murdered. Another man lay dead, beside her."

"Yet you delayed coming forward with this information for several hours. Why did you not immediately report the murder of the Queen?"

"Forgive me, your Grace, but I was terrified. I had no idea who was in charge, after the Queen’s murder. For all I knew, I’d be putting my head in a noose. But, eventually, I decided I couldn’t live with myself if I failed to report what I knew."

"What do you have to say, Lady Stark?"

"I say he is a liar. I never set foot in the Royal Sept today. Question my servants, if you wish. They will confirm that I was in my rooms, until you summoned me to the Painted Chamber."

"Loyal servants will always lie for their mistress. " Mariah glances towards the door on the right. "You were not the only person to be identified. Ser Addam Webber is currently being put to the question. Do you think he will confirm your story?"

"I think he will say whatever your torturers tell him to say. I’m sure he’d confess to the murder of King Aerys, if it would end his pain. Your Grace, I don’t understand what this man’s motives are, but you know as well as I do, that is not lawful to condemn a Peer, without a trial. Nor is it lawful
to torture a Peer. I will take my chances at trial, if I must. I have no doubt that I shall prove my innocence." Yara bursts out laughing. Mariah holds up her hand.

"Your Grace, Lady Stark is entirely correct. I will proceed strictly according to the law. That is why I have brought Lord Edmure, Maester Wolkan, and Lady Arryn to this place, that they may know that due process has been followed. Lady Stark, you are entitled to a trial, before a jury of lords. If you are acquitted, then you will be a free woman. If however, you are convicted, let me remind you of the sentence imposed on a woman for regicide. "To be beheaded, or burned, at the Queen Regent's pleasure". Let me assure you, Lady Stark, that if you are found guilty, it will be my very great pleasure, to have you burned at the stake. I will ensure that this takes place before the citizens of Kings Landing, outside the Great Sept. I imagine that the burning of the beautiful Lady of Winterfell would draw quite the crowd. A skilled executioner can make his victim experience the full agony of fire for as long as an hour. It must feel like an eternity of suffering."

"I will take my chances, in court, your Grace"

"Or you can take my bargain. If you are guilty of the Queen's murder, if you make a full confession now and assist fully with our investigation, then, for the sake of your sister, and your nephew, my son, I shall spare your life. You will spend the rest of your life confined to Gaston Grey. You will be treated in a manner appropriate to your rank, but you will never be set at liberty. Your daughter will become a ward of the Crown. I shall appoint your sister as her legal guardian, until she comes of age."

"Sansa" says Edmure gently "If you are really guilty of this crime, her Grace is making you a very generous offer. I will not raise my banners on your behalf, if you are condemned at trial".

There is a long pause, as Sansa considers her options, but in reality, the decision makes itself. "Your Grace, my lords, I am guilty of the murder of Queen Daenerys Targaryen."

"I am pleased that you have chosen the path of wisdom, " says Mariah. "Now tell me, was Madame Cithrin Bel Sarcour a party to the Queen's murder."

"She was not, your Grace."

"But you receive assistance? How else could you have made contact with a Meereenese nobleman?"

"I conspired with Tyrion Lannister."

Cithrin looks daggers at her, and swears foully. "Please free her Excellency" Mariah instructs the officer who brought Sansa to this room. "Madame Cithrin, I must apologise for your treatment. You were as much the victim of this conspiracy as Queen Daenerys was"

"Why did you seek to implicate the government of Braavos in the murder?"

"I wanted the war to resume."

"You evil bitch, you'd have had me tortured and murdered!" screams Cithrin, lunging for her. She is restrained by guards.

"Madame Cithrin, believe me, I understand your feelings. But, I have guaranteed Lady Sansa her life. I am happy to conclude peace with the Serene Republic, upon the terms you have proposed, provided that Tyrion Lannister is returned to me, to face justice."

"It will be a pleasure, your Grace."
"Good. Lady Sansa, my notary will take your confession. Among other things, you will be sparing Ser Addam Webber a good deal of suffering, if you give full details of his role in your conspiracy. My mercy will not extend beyond sentencing him to be beheaded, rather than experiencing the full horrors of a traitor's death, but there is no need to continue his torture."

The Queen rises, and leaves the room, along with most of those present. Sansa suddenly remembers the soothsayer at Harrenhall. She was right. She will outlive her worst enemy, and she will die old. It is better than she deserves.

Chapter End Notes

1. Gaston Grey is a prison island owned by the Martells. It has an unpleasant reputation. Despite that, Sansa won't be tortured or abused there, but her life will be pretty dismal. It is still better than she deserves, as she realises.

2. Ser Dontos Hollard was part of Littlefinger's conspiracy to murder King Joffrey. He was promised an immense sum of money, but Littlefinger murdered him in front of Sansa. It is natural that she would have followed his example, and had her own agents murder Daenerys' guards. As part of her plea bargain with Queen Mariah, she will also sacrifice these agents.
Grey Worm is waiting on the quay at Dragonstone, as the ship from Braavos reaches the harbour. He has been anticipating this moment for several weeks. With him are Lady Arya, Prince Quentyn and Queen Yara. As is Lady Sansa, who will witness justice being done, before she begins her long journey South to her imprisonment for life. Queen Mariah, and her children, have returned to the capital, where urgent business awaits. Peace has now been concluded with Braavos and the rebel lords. He thinks that Sansa and her paramour were treated with absurd leniency, but he does not question the orders of his sovereign. At least he will avenge his Queen today. The ship bears a most precious cargo.

At last it docks. With agonising slowness, it is tied to the quay, and eventually, a gangplank is thrown down. And then he sees him! A wicked little stump, hooded, his hands bound behind his back. The creature is led down the gangplank, in front of Grey Worm. Inarticulate moans can be heard from under the hood. The ship's captain presents his prisoner to Grey Worm.

"My thanks, Captain. I trust you will wish to witness justice being done today."

"Of course, my lord. This creature is as much a traitor to my country as to yours."

"Grey Worm nods, and one of the Unsullied removes the creature's hood. It is gagged, and the gag is removed. The creature starts babbling for mercy. "Quiet, shitface!" cries Grey Worm, giving it the back of his hand. He glares down at the little monster. "Now God is very good. I begged the Queen Regent for this honour, Lord Imp, and she granted it to me. You are the vilest of traitors. From the time that Queen Daenerys, of blessed memory, made you her Hand, you conspired against her. You made a bargain with the Sons of the Harpy, to restore slavery, going against her Grace's explicit orders. When you came to Westeros, you gave her bad advice repeatedly, in order to aid your foul sister. Not content with your crimes, you then incited Prince Jon to murder her. You were rightly sentenced to die as a parricide. Yet, she let you go into exile, as an act of grace, after Prince Jon and Lady Arya pleaded for your life."

"I warned Daenerys, I warned her, that this thing is evil!" cries Yara Greyjoy. "Would that she had listened to me."

"The wolf comes but once to the trap" resumes Grey Worm "but you will not escape a second time. You betrayed the Queen's mercy by conspiring with another traitor, Lady Sansa Stark, to murder her. She is here to witness your punishment today, before she is imprisoned for the rest of her life. Just as foully, you betrayed the people who had given you refuge, by pretending they were responsible for this crime. You have cumbered the Earth for long enough, Tyrion of House Lannister. It is now time for you to die. If you have any last words, now is the moment."

Tyrion looks up, terrified. "You have spared Lady Sansa, but she is far more guilty than I. She
forced me to participate in her crimes. She threatened to assassinate me, unless I aided her. Take her life, I beg you, but only spare me, and I shall their Graces’ most loyal subject."

"Liar!" screams Sansa.

"A coward and a liar to the end, I see. If I had my way, Lady Sansa would indeed face the same death as you, but I obey my Queen’s orders. And those orders are quite clear, as far as you are concerned. Tyrion of House Lannister, Queen Daenerys was the mother of us all. Twice, you conspired to murder her. I therefore sentence you to die as a parricide. May you be denied light and earth, for the rest of your life. Go now to your fate, evil man, parricide, traitor. " Tyrion starts howling, uncontrollably. Two Unsullied step forward with an open leather sack. Grey Worm picks him up by the scruff of his neck, and dumps him in the sack. "I see no reason why dumb animals should have to share their last minutes with such as you. A lead weight will suffice. " Another Unsullied places the weight in the sack. "But I tire of your mewling. " Grey Worm forces open the mouth of the wretch, and deftly removes his tongue, with his dagger. Tyrion chokes and gurgles, hideously. The sack is tied with ropes, muffling his cries.

Grey Worm nods again. The two Unsullied place the writhing sack in a rowing boat, and then take the oars. They row a short distance into the harbour, as the rest watch. Then, one of them tips the sack into the sea. There is a brief flurry of bubbles. Then, nothing.

Chapter End Notes

I fear Tyrion was the victim of authorial malice in this chapter. In my defence, I am reacting to D & D's attempt to make him a magical dwarf, perfectly perfect in every way.
Arya is standing in the prow of the Queen's Revenge, admiring the view of Tarth, as the Sun sets. She holds Sansa's hand. She offered to travel to Gaston Grey by ship, with her, and will spend several days there, before returning to the Vale. She has retired as Hand and Master of Whisperers. In effect, she will rule the Vale, until Catelyn Arryn comes of age.

"I've made a mess of my life" Sansa comments. "I was blinded with hatred for the Dragon Queen, and could never be content with what I had. But, she was an evil woman. I can't say I regret killing her."

"You played the Game of Thrones, and you lost. But, you're luckier than most losers. You still live."

"I know. When they took me to the Undercroft, I thought they'd torture me to death. Why did the Queen Regent let me live?"

"She wanted you to confess your crime, voluntarily. If she'd tortured a confession out of you, and then put you to death, you'd have been seen as a martyr, across the North, the Vale and the Riverlands. Keeping the Vale in order is going to be hard enough for me, after the death of Sweetrobin and the knights. Imagine how much harder it would be if the Lady of the Eyrie had been tortured to death. And it suits her to show clemency to you. The people will see her as a kind, benevolent, ruler."

"She's a shrewd woman. I don't think I would have done that, had our positions been reversed."

"Dorne has always been a snakepit. The Martells haven't survived for centuries without being clever. Bear in mind" and she turns to face Sansa "that if you ever do plot a return to power, Mariah will put you to death. I won't be able to save you."

"Some chance of that. Believe me, I'm not going to risk my life again. Still, I can't say I'm looking forward to spending the rest of my life on Gaston Grey."

"I'll send you books, wine, other gifts. I'll visit you with your daughter." Sansa looks troubled.

"Wouldn't it be better if my daughter thinks I'm dead?"

"She'll discover the truth about you, sooner or later. I think it's best that she should hear it from you. Yes, it will be painful for her, but less painful than hearing it from others. There's something more you should know, for your comfort. I've persuaded the Queen that if you cause no trouble, then in a few years, you'll be moved to the Water Gardens. I've heard they're beautiful. You'll always be under guard, but you'll be happy there, I think."

Sansa laughs. "Well, I'll have no shortage of lemon cakes. To think I used to call you "horseface". You've been a far better sister to me than I ever deserved."
"None of us get what we deserve. Thankfully. I've done things in my life that I'm not proud of. You called Daenerys an evil woman. So she was, in a way. She committed great crimes. I won't deny that I've committed crimes in her service. She was also the best ruler we've had since her great-grandfather, Aegon. Her father was mad, Robert was a drunken thug, Joffrey and Cersei were vicious, and Tommen was just a sad boy. The great families of the Vale might hate her, but I can assure you that the Smallfolk respected her. She cut their taxes, and gave them justice. And, she had the good sense to forgive Jon. The Smallfolk may have respected her, but they loved Jon."

"And, Jon died because of my ambitions. I blamed Daenerys, but I'm the one who was really to blame."

"In large part. I know you never wanted him dead, but he died because of your rebellion. You'll have to live with that fact to the end of your days. If it torments you, then, good. It ought to."

"I know, it should. " After a pause she says "We're the last of the Starks, Arya. Bran will never father a child. Catelyn will grow up to be an Arryn. Jon's children will grow up to be Targaryens. Our blood will live on, but our name will die. Unless you claim Winterfell for yourself, and marry."

"Not likely. Ruling the Vale and bringing up your daughter will be task enough."

They remain holding hands, in companionable silence, as the Sun sinks beneath the horizon.
Epilogue: Vita Sanctae Daenerys

Chapter Summary

Dragonstone, the Royal Sept, 3rd June AC 410

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Septa Delamere prays for a vision of the Saint, before the altar in Queen Rhaella's chapel. Her icon, silver-haired, purple-eyed, head surrounded by a golden halo, stares down at her. In her dreams, she has seen her, seated at the right hand of the Mother. Some of her sisters have been granted such a vision; they are blessed indeed. Almost a century has passed since she was martyred for her faith. As soon as her ashes had been interred, miracles were being reported at her tomb. Within two decades of her death, the High Septon had declared her a martyr, worthy of veneration. Fifty years later, the Most Devout had canonised her. She has fasted for three days in the hope of a vision. Her stomach gnaws at her, and she knows she must eat soon.

After an hour of prayer, she rises and leaves. She enters the school attached to the Royal Sept, where she is due to teach her class of novices. She reads to them, first from the Seven Pointed Star, and then, from her favourite devotional work; Vita Sanctae Daenerys; she first describes the great deeds and miracles which she performed, and then turns to her martyrdom; “and the Saint was tortured by Lady Stark and her minions with every refinement of savagery. They put out her eyes, and tore at her skin and breasts, with cruel hooks and pincers, and burned her with hot irons, cursing and blaspheming all the while like wild creatures of the woods. For Lady Stark was herself a warg and had carnal knowledge of the beasts and demons of her Northern forests. Yet the Saint laughed her tormentors to scorn, and warned them of the judgement that awaited them, and praised the Seven for allowing her to die as a witness to the Faith. And so she expired, and entered Heaven to the rejoicing of the Saints and the Blessed Martyrs who dwell with the Seven.”

"And the blasphemers came to no happy end. For worms came to Lady Stark, and they consumed her flesh, and bred within the recesses of her body. And her body rotted, even as she lived, and all men and women fled her, for they could not endure the stench of her putrefaction, save for one maid only, and she died in misery and shame. And the other murderers perished in divers terrible ways, and entered upon the judgement that was ordained for them. So may all men and women be made aware of the fate that awaits those who persecute the Faithful.”

Septa Delamere ends the day's instruction, and retires to the Refectory. She wishes she could continue fasting, but her body is weak, and so she consumes porridge and small beer. She reflects that the Saint is actually worshipped as a goddess in the East, but that is a dreadful blasphemy. So many people in Essos remain mired in heathen darkness. She hopes one day to bring the Faith to them. Before retiring for the evening, she returns to the Royal Sept, to gaze upon the Saint's tomb. On it is inscribed the legend:-

"Hic iacet Daenerys, Regina Quondam futuraque" - Here Lies Daenerys, the Once and Future Queen.

Chapter End Notes
1. It was not at all unusual for medieval European rulers to be canonised, such as Justinian and Theodora, St. Edward the Confessor, St. Louis, and/or for miracles to be attributed to them. Some of them were pretty unsaintly. Irene of Athens was almost made a saint, for restoring the veneration of icons to the Eastern Empire, but her blinding of her own son ultimately put paid to that; she was still venerated as a most holy woman. Likewise St. Olga of Kiev had her enemies burned and buried alive (I think my Daenerys would regard her as a kindred spirit). The Russian Orthodox Church holds her in high esteem.

2. This concludes this tale. I originally intended it to run for about 10,000 words, but it grew in the telling to 49,000. I hope you enjoyed it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!