

in the womanly arts of love." He smiled thinly. "She's very good, Illyrio and I can both swear to that."

Ser Jorah Mormont apologized for his gift. "It is a small thing, my princess, but all a poor exile could afford," he said as he laid a small stack of old books before her. They were histories and songs of the Seven Kingdoms, she saw, written in the Common Tongue. She thanked him with all her heart.

Magister Illyrio murmured a command, and four burly slaves hurried forward, bearing between them a great cedar chest bound in bronze. When she opened it, she found piles of the finest velvets and damasks the Free Cities could produce . . . and resting on top, nestled in the soft cloth, three huge eggs. Dany gasped. They were the most beautiful things she had ever seen, each different than the others, patterned in such rich colors that at first she thought they were crusted with jewels, and so large it took both of her hands to hold one. She lifted it delicately, expecting that it would be made of some fine porcelain or delicate enamel, or even blown glass, but it was much heavier than that, as if it were all of solid stone. The surface of the shell was covered with tiny scales, and as she turned the egg between her fingers, they shimmered like polished metal in the light of the setting sun. One egg was a deep green, with burnished bronze flecks that came and went depending on how Dany turned it. Another was pale cream streaked with gold. The last was black, as black as a midnight sea, yet alive with scarlet ripples and swirls. "What are they?" she asked, her voice hushed and full of wonder.

"Dragon's eggs, from the Shadow Lands beyond Asshai," said Magister Illyrio. "The eons have turned them to stone, yet still they burn bright with beauty."

"I shall treasure them always." Dany had heard tales of such eggs, but she had never seen one, nor thought to see one. It was a truly magnificent gift, though she knew that Illyrio could afford to be lavish. He had collected a fortune in horses and slaves for his part in selling her to Khal Drogo.

The *khal's* bloodriders offered her the traditional three weapons, and splendid weapons they were. Haggio gave her a great leather whip with a silver handle, Cohollo a magnificent *arakh* chased in gold, and Qotho a double-

curved dragonbone bow taller than she was. Magister Illyrio and Ser Jorah had taught her the traditional refusals for these offerings. "This is a gift worthy of a great warrior, O blood of my blood, and I am but a woman. Let my lord husband bear these in my stead." And so Khal Drogo too received his "bride gifts."

Other gifts she was given in plenty by other Dothraki: slippers and jewels and silver rings for her hair, medallion belts and painted vests and soft furs, sandsilks and jars of scent, needles and feathers and tiny bottles of purple glass, and a gown made from the skin of a thousand mice. "A handsome gift, *Khaleesi*," Magister Illyrio said of the last, after he had told her what it was. "Most lucky." The gifts mounted up around her in great piles, more gifts than she could possibly imagine, more gifts than she could want or use.

And last of all, Khal Drogo brought forth his own bride gift to her. An expectant hush rippled out from the center of the camp as he left her side, growing until it had swallowed the whole *khalasar*. When he returned, the dense press of Dothraki gift-givers parted before him, and he led the horse to her.

She was a young filly, spirited and splendid. Dany knew just enough about horses to know that this was no ordinary animal. There was something about her that took the breath away. She was grey as the winter sea, with a mane like silver smoke.

Hesitantly she reached out and stroked the horse's neck, ran her fingers through the silver of her mane. Khal Drogo said something in Dothraki and Magister Illyrio translated. "Silver for the silver of your hair, the *khal* says."

"She's beautiful," Dany murmured.

"She is the pride of the *khalasar*," Illyrio said. "Custom decrees that the *khaleesi* must ride a mount worthy of her place by the side of the *khal*."

Drogo stepped forward and put his hands on her waist. He lifted her up as easily as if she were a child and set her on the thin Dothraki saddle, so much smaller than the ones she was used to. Dany sat there uncertain for a moment. No one had told her about this part. "What should I do?" she asked Illyrio.