**Chapter 25**

**Spring and Dornish War**

**Ser Endrew Selmy**

This winter, in his humble opinion, had been a very good thing.

Endrew was aware his opinion would not be shared by scores of Noble and Masterly Houses. These big-nosed Masters of the Reach, and the Stormlands had suffered harshly from the Dance of the Dragons and the Iron Fever. This time, the pride of the Seven Kingdoms had learned what it meant to lose loved ones and see their armies cut down by monsters they could do nothing but scream against.

But for him, it had been a very good period. Andrew Storm, the bastard that the Lord of Harvest Hall had refused to recognise as his, was no more. Ser Endrew Selmy had taken his place, after several years of good and loyal service under Lord Larys Strong, and he was third in line for the Lordship of Harvest Hall. As the first in line was a sickly boy who had survived the Iron Fever by miracle, Endrew was confident he was only a couple ‘hunting accidents’ far from claiming the Lordship for his own.

Oh yes, this winter had been a very good season and spring had promised to be even better.

Why did the damned Dornish have to ruin his projects and hopes?

By the time the warmer winds came and snow disappeared for hopefully at least five or six years, Endrew had been consciously planning the harvests of the three villages he was now supposed to oversee. Normally, this was a task that no knight needed to think about or advice the smallfolk, but the epidemic had ravaged the lands of the Marches where he was now ruling, and plenty of farmers and livestock owners were young and untested.

There were plenty of deeds to do in new lands, but when the Master of Whisperers sent a letter to Harvest Hall with the Royal Seal of the Green Dragon on it, you did not refuse the order. Endrew had kneeled, swore he would man the watchtowers of the Boneway as King Daeron had ordered, and departed with two scores of his men and four more scores of Harvest Hall and the other villages sworn to House Selmy.

At first, he had been flattered to be chosen to command this force. One hundred and twenty men did not sound like much, but save the Lord of Blackhaven levies, men-at-arms, and knights, it was a powerful company, and it was under his command. Yes, there was only two other knights to lead the detachment, but frankly in the Marches it wasn’t as much a problem as it would be elsewhere. The Boneway was not a flat pass at all, and those who boasted they would ride to Yronwood without setting a foot on the ground were more likely to kill their mounts in a few turn of hourglasses than achieving anything else.

It had only been at first, alas. By the third day they had camped at the mountain pass of Roland’s Lament, he had realised the rumours of Dornish raids and ongoing preparations for war were not as ridiculous as he had thought. Their first night they had killed two half-frozen Dornish scouts who had tried to steal his horse. Their third day had been the scene of a short exchange of arrows with one of these damned ‘viper archers’. These bastards had never lost their love with poisoned projectiles. He had lost three good spearmen for five raiders.

Endrew had immediately sent two out of the four ravens the young blonde-haired maester had brought with him to Blackhaven and Nightsong. The Dornish men they had killed were no bandits; their leather armours were of good quality, and the Wyl colours were painted bright on it.

This was war, unless the other Dornish Lords suddenly decided to tighten the leash around the Wyl of Wyl neck, and what was the chance of that?

“We will be able to hurt them with the boulders at each pass, Ser Rick,” he told his second, who had also received knighthood...though for him, it was a bit late to found a Knightly House at fifty-one name days. “We have brought a lot of arrows and Blackhaven will give us more.”

“We can bleed the Wyl men if they come alone,” the grey-haired old man approved.

Endrew didn’t bother asking him what they could do if House Wyl had been reinforced by half of Dorne and plenty of sellsword companies. It was not worth wasting his saliva. The terrain in the Boneway favoured the defenders to a large degree, especially if you had local shepherds and lone hermits on your side to reveal you the existence of the goat passes and the like, but one hundred and twenty swords, bows and spears would never stop a Dornish army by themselves.

“But we mustn’t forget the Wyls know this terrain as well,” since they had tried to conquer and hold it for the last three or four centuries, he didn’t add.

How he wished at this moment there were four or five thousand men in this pass ready to give a warm welcome to their southern ‘friends’. Unfortunately, whatever plan the Clubfoot and the King had agreed to didn’t seem to include armies marching southwards to punish the banners of Dorne for their unjustified hostility.

“Warn me if you see more raiders.”

But the afternoon ended before a single man sworn to the Wyls was sighted again.

The morning after was an entirely different affair.

Something like two large hourglasses after dawn, the first archers sent one mountain ahead, where technically the frontier between the Kingdom of the Green Dragon ended and Dorne began, returned in all haste.

“It is a gigantic snake of steel, banners and spears, Ser,” the young black-haired archer chosen to report first told him. “We saw the banners of House Fowler, Uller, Qorgyle, Yronwood, and of course Wyl. There are also many standards which looked Essossi. And they have hundreds of horse. The elders think there are at least six thousand in this formation alone.”

And this was just for the Boneway. They may attack the other passes leading to Nightsong in strength.

“Well,” Endrew answered, “they surely marching in our direction to impress us with their chivalry and the legendary Dornish courtesy.”

A few men chuckled and the majority of the one hundred-plus men he had here returned his smile.

“We must give Blackhaven the time to prepare their defences and the rest of our forces to arrive and hunt these jackals down.”

The Dornish Army was marching north. Once again, Westeros was at war.

**Lord Belial Wyl**

From the moment he had first breathed, Belial had hated the Marchers Lords of the Stormlands and the Reach. When he had grown older, he had truly begun to loathe them and revile their very existence.

It was only natural, as his father said. Their northern enemies had stolen generations ago the lands of House Wyl, and now it was their great duty to take them back and punish these thieves and usurpers. Let them look elsewhere for a few months and believe the smiles of the merchants, all the good. But there would be no true peace until the black adder stood triumphant.

Houses Caron and Swann, House Selmy and Dondarrion, he was all going to make sure they were extinct. The Dance had brought them to the edge of the precipice, and he, the Wyl of Wyl, was going to push them while relishing their screams, their shrieks and their tears.

He was enjoying at this very moment the agony of the two Selmy swordsmen that had been captured in the battle of Bone’s Gate Pass.

As much as battles went, this had been something of a disappointment. The enemy had less than thirty knights in plate, and they had not tried anything save a slow and cowardly defence. Banners of Houses Connington, Selmy and Dondarrion had been seen, but less than six hundred men had been there to protect the last natural defence before Blackhaven.

It was good for it meant his plan had caught the enemy by surprise as he had expected, but Gods, how boring it was! The weak Marchers were fleeing before his archers had the time to use five arrows each, and for the moment the humidity and the spring floods were causing more problems to his infantry than the enemy’s spears.

But since they refused to be entertaining, he saw no need to give swift deaths to the Stormlanders he had captured.

“Once you have finished cutting their hands and their ears,” he ordered to his cousin Wyland, a loyal soul who had at great risk for himself challenged the Prince a couple of years ago and lost one arm in the deed, “cut their feet. Then tie them to the biggest rock you can find and bathe them in pig’s blood and snake’s venom. The vultures and the other predators of the Webway must feast well tonight.”

His cousin and the four men he had temporarily appointed as his personal executioners saluted by striking their fists on their bloody breastplates, and Belial mounted his horse to return at the centres of his column. As fond as he was of torture, the Boneway in this pass was not large enough to let more than six or seven foot soldiers march in the same direction at the same time, and he couldn’t afford to stop the army, even to show them the first taste of what was awaiting the Marcher Lords when they finally began their revenge.

The words ‘his army’ were honey to his ears, truthfully. The great army travelling northwards with him was the greatest army Dorne had fielded in three or four generations, with eight thousand men, and he knew more were coming behind.

The Greens, the Marcher Lords, the Stormlanders and the Reachers would be lucky to put twenty thousand spears on a battlefield in five moons, and when they did, there would be thirty thousand Dornish spears to crush them. Once the Marcher host was defeated and Blackhaven conquered with a good old storming, the vast plains of the Reach from Tumbleton to Highgarden were going to be ripe for the pillaging and the conquest.

“At last the time of revenge and victory has arrived!” he shouted to his troops.

Three days later, his joy had disappeared as he watched the walls of Blackhaven three leagues away. The Marcher Lords had refused to offer battle, preferring to stay hidden behind the stone and the steel of their castle.

The emissary he had sent towards the gates – an Essossi company commander who had the gall to criticise his methods – received ten arrows and a rain of rocks and never returned to the camp. Good riddance.

He had expected no less from these usurpers and cravens, and since he had always intended to kill every Dondarrion man, woman and child from the oldest crone to the youngest babe, this was making things easier.

But he had not expected the terrain around Blackhaven to be so...empty. There were a few fields and always some pastures for the goats, the sheep and the various animals a Lordship kept. The villages had been torched. There was no trace of any well or any source of water. There were no supplies, no water, nothing that could be used by his army.

“It doesn’t matter,” Belial told his ally Lord Uller as the sun set with a reddish light behind the mountains. “Our siege engines will be here tomorrow. We storm Blackhaven in two days. They can’t have more than three thousand green smallfolk with rusted weapons behind these walls. We take Blackhaven and I will take half of the army by the Harvest Pass while you take the other half to Summerhall.”

“And if a dragon comes to attack us, we have thousands of archers here and dozens of scorpions to strike him down!” his fellow Lord laughed. “Soon we will drink in dragonbone cups!”

**King Daeron Targaryen**

When he had been eight, Daeron had looked at the naval galley *Redoubtable*, and proclaimed with the certainty of a child it was invincible.

As he grew older, the young Targaryen had rapidly realised nothing could be more untrue, especially with his regular visits in the harbour of Oldtown – where by the way he was never welcome when Tessarion was in his company.

Ships built by mortal hands, whatever their sizes and their purposes, were terribly vulnerable to fire. There was a reason the odour of smoke was one of the scariest things sailors dreaded, and it was not because the men and women sailing from the Sunset Sea to distant Yi-Ti were cowards.

Everything on a ship could burn, if its crew was not careful. The sails, the ropes, and the hull were obvious, but just a few of the prominent aspects of a ship that had to be protected. The only thing that was not a problem was metallic goods, but when the fire touched them, good luck throwing them overboard.

And contrary to what was often said in the taverns, no a war galley was not less vulnerable to the flames. Ballista, scorpions and the diverse siege engines were made in wood, and one instant of inattention could be the last. Archers who wanted to use incendiary arrows could burn their own ships if they were clumsy. Yes, there were fire-fighting parties. Yes, there was sand and various artifices to stop a ship from burning.

In reality when a battle began, a lot of men were busy dying or shouting orders not making sense anymore, and flames went out of control fast.

It had been the case at Old Wyk, where he had destroyed the assembled fleet of the Ironborn. The scene had been unpleasant, and even leagues away, he had heard the screams and the fires of the inferno he had unleashed on his enemies.

Now it was the turn of Wyl.

“Tessarion. Dracarys!”

The Blue Queen roared once more and unleashed a storm of flames on the four merchant ships he had not attacked in the first place. Thank the Father, the Dornish sailors aboard these ships had understood what he had planned and had started to jump ships well before he arrived above them.

Ten breaths later, the small carracks were lost unless the defenders had someone to walk in an inferno, and Daeron returned to the wider battle.

There was...not much to do, to be honest.

Of the fifty-plus ships which had been in the Wyl harbour or nearby when he had begun his attack at dawn, none were intact. At least five had been scuttled by their own captains along the docks to preserve them from the fury of dragonfire. Ten more were sunk or sinking – one war galley in particular had only its mainmast above the sea level now.

The rest of the ships were in fire, and not on a single hull the fire-fighting crews were winning their valiant but desperate battle. It was not that surprising: dragonfire was superior to wildfire, and the latter was capable to ignore water, piss and various ‘mysterious substances’ prepared by Maesters and Alchemists. The Dornish had little chance to find a solution in less than a turn of hourglass.

“This should be one out of three of the Dornish ships gone, with this battle,” he said aloud. Tessarion growled, but somehow Daeron didn’t think his dragon was very much concerned about the logistical problems of this new war. “Yes, yes I know. You will have your cow when we return at Stonehelm.”

Not that he had ever thought to substitute the livestock for another sort of meat. Dragons were not the equals of human in intelligence, but feasting on human corpses tended to have very negative effects on their willingness to obey orders. Daeron had, using his own men, managed to recover a large number of disturbing reports about Sunfyre during the Dance. Yes, Aegon had eventually managed to reclaim his golden bonded, but there was no denying the former dragon had been more vicious, less controllable and his brother had to go to Dragonstone before fighting his last battle. Sunfyre had not come for him, and if it was not a sign the bond had been badly damaged...

“To the south-west, Tessarion,” he commanded with a pressure of his right foot. “I want to see how their warehouses and tents are faring.”

The answer, as he passed a third time above the camps and the villages south of the Wyl fortress, was: not very well. One in two of the houses, granaries, mills and livestock barns were consumed by dragonfire, and the rest the Blue Queen rapidly remedied with burst of blue flames.

“And now we can go back to Stonehelm, our duty for the day accomplished.”

All the goals he and his War Council had wanted to accomplish with this aerial raid had been achieved. The warships which may have been have to contest the arrival of his fleet squadrons in a fortnight or two would be unable to fight. The hulls owned by merchants of Planky Town and elsewhere would no longer transport the weapons and supplies any army needed to field for a campaign.

The warehouses, the granaries, the tents, the food, the water and everything the Nobles Houses had sent here to help in their ambitious war of conquest were unsuitable for human comfort and stomach. And it was early spring; such had been the willingness of the Dornish to declare war. The nights in the Marches were rather cold, and they would be colder now for the spearmen and the archers.

Moreover, Dorne was wealthy but they were not the Lannisters; one blow like this and if Larys was right, they would need more than one hundred thousand gold dragons to replace the goods and the supplies they had lost ashore. The ships, carracks, war galleys, sloops and galleass, would cost more and take far longer to replace.

This was when whoever was commanding unveiled a last gambit: agitating a large red flag atop the dungeon, shoot five scorpion bolts with his great siege engines, and use five or six mirrors to reflect the sunlight.

“Ignore him Tessarion...this Wyl isn’t worth the trouble...”

Fortunately, his dragon seemed more amused than angry at the light signals and the visual challenge provided by the defenders.

It was good, because Daeron had no wish to be drawn into a fight with the Wyl fortress. He was at the moment the only dragonrider of the Kingdom of Southern Westeros – or, as everyone called it these days, the Green Kingdom – and he had no intention to condemn it to a humiliating defeat because his arrogance got the better of him.

Yes, in all likelihood he could torch Wyl and everything within, but why take the risk? The surroundings of the fortress had been burned, the docks were ruined, and the army supplies were destroyed. The walls of the castle were going to stand over a spectacle of dragonfire and devastation.

The smallfolk of the region would demand their liege Lord fed them, something they would probably not if his castle received the same treatment as Harrenhal. And it would probably worry a lot the swordsmen and the infantry currently marching north in the Boneway without enraging them beyond reason.

“Tomorrow, we will do the same to the Tor. After that, we will attack the supply convoys in the passes before burning the supply camps of Skyreach and Blackmont.”

And thus exasperate the soldiers guarding the siege engines close to Blackhaven and the main Dornish armies.

The sand dwellers were soon going to regret their intentions to break the peace.

Now if only the Blacks could be reasonable and stay idle...

**Lord Belial Wyl**

The Lord of the Hellholt had a temper, despite having not yet celebrated his twentieth name day.

“Damn it! Damn the bitch! Damn the dragons! Damn these cowards! Damn the traitors! Damn these useless captains! Damn them! DAMN THEM ALL!”

Two cups, several candles, an empty scabbard, five dices and a series of objects Belial had not the leisure to examine were thrown everywhere around the ten, before Lord Vorian Uller screamed his fury and anger to the four winds and left the tent shouting enough insults to impress a sellsword company.

“The Ullers are mad,” Lord Ulrich Qorgyle began.

“Yes, yes I know the proverb,” Belial Wyl interrupted him. “You don’t need to remind me.”

The moment the words on his lips, he realised he should have let the older man finish his useless tirade, as the Master of Sandstone glared at him. Ulrich was an old man of fifty-four, and had never been shy to inform Lord Uller and himself that they were too young to know how to correctly wage this war.

“In this case...do you need to be reminded of the damage King Daeron has done to our armies?”

“Our army is still intact,” the Lord of Wyl gritted between his teeth. “We have eight thousand men besieging Blackhaven.”

It was to save the appearances, and he knew it. Yes, the eight thousand men were there, but they could not stay there. House Dondarrion and its allies had removed everything edible and drinkable around their castles, except maybe the rats.

His army could not forage. There wasn’t anything to extort, steal or take by force from the Marchers.

His army could not continue northwards. Their scouts had been told to patrol beyond the Boneway, and by all accounts Harvest Hall and Summerhall had heavy garrisons and more levies and companies from the Stormlands and the Reach were arriving every day. Rushing north to confront these forces with House Dondarrion ready to close the Boneway behind them would not find favour among his captains.

“We have eight thousand men and there won’t be one more in reinforcements,” replied the Lord of House Qorgyle. “You have heard like me the messengers of our Princess. House Martell and its reinforcements will go no further than Yronwood until we have secured Blackhaven and the passes.”

Yes, he had heard the messages. And he regretted now not having arranged an accident for this bitch. It would not have been difficult to find someone more malleable and eager to listen to their plans.

“It will backfire on her when we emerge victorious.” He forced himself to be calm. He wanted to torture someone, but since they had made no prisoners in the twelve days of the current siege, he was denied this pleasure.

“I thought you were ambitious. I did not think you were stupid.” Belial was ready to grip his spear but Qorgyle had not finished speaking. “House Wyl is going to be ruined for the next decade if Sunspear does not open its coffers or you don’t take enough plunder in this campaign.” A finger was pointed at the parchment they had just received. “According to this, your harbour will need to be entirely rebuilt, as will five villages and the lands have been torched by dragonfire...again.”

“Yes, this was a defeat.” It was more than that, and they both knew it. “But we have declared war. If the dragon decides to burn the Dornish villages behind us, he will anger our people and make them all the more eager to wage war against the lackeys of the Targaryens!”

Ulrich shook his head in denial.

“Our smallfolk and our soldiers will be angry to be sure, but we are sure to starve first.” The older Lord took a second-hand map between his hands before shaking his head again. “We wanted to fight the war so eagerly there has been no time to harvest. And we have plenty of the young men who should have done it in our lands with us...”

“What are you trying to say?” Belial asked as neutrally as he could.

“I’m saying,” Ulrich Qorgyle answered, “that between the losses your House has suffered in the dragon raid and the men you have in this army, there is not much left in your castle and Princess Aliandra can very well attaint your line if this army is defeated.”

“She will not dare,” the Wyl of Wyl retorted. “The war alliance stands strong...she would be removed in a heartbeat if at the first sign of difficulty she returned to Sunspear. No, there’s nothing to worry around on that front.”

Besides, it was unlikely the Green King had limited himself to raids on lands belonging to House Wyl. And if he had struck more Houses, Wyl would have more allies to prosecute this war of vengeance.

“Then what is your suggestion, my Lord?”

Belial took on himself not to react at the sarcasm behind the ‘my Lord’.

“We need to storm Blackhaven. Tomorrow.”

“Of course. And the day after that we will jump over the mountains and assault Highgarden before the second moon of this year is over.”

“I am serious!” Belial growled.

“Ha!” Ulrich Qorgyle raised his eyes from the map he was reading. “And how do you intend to proceed, Lord Wyl? The small scorpions and trebuchets we brought here with the vanguard were built with mobility and precision in mind...to slay a dragon which refuses to come to us. They were never built to breach the walls of Blackhaven. The real siege-breakers, the large catapults and their like, were at Wyl or transported in the Boneway when the blue reptile struck their convoys. Everything we have for this siege, we have it now, and we are missing half of our ladders.”

The Lord of Sandstone poured himself a coup of cold water and drank it before continuing.

“It is spring, but the terrain around the castle is more stone than earth and the sappers have not a chance in the Seven Hells to dig a mine which will make these ramparts collapse.”

“And I suppose, of course, that you have a better idea.” He supposed his ancestors would forgive him if he was a bit bitter when he uttered the words.

 “I have. We leave three thousand men here and our siege engines to ensure the Marchers will not sally behind us, and we disperse the rest of the army in raiding columns two or three hundred-strong. The servants of the Targaryen have fortified the two main passes, but they can’t watch over all the goat paths and the mountains. We avoid them and we begin a campaign of raiding and pillage across the Marches and the southern Reach, only gathering in numbers to assault fords and minor towns.”

“It is a strategy of weakness!”

To his surprise, Ulrich Qorgyle nodded in agreement.

“It is. But unless you have not remarked, our enemy has a dragon, and the beast has just crippled our supply base. We are not in a position of strength anymore.”

Seen like this, it was almost reasonable...but Belial really wanted the Dondarrions dead and flayed, and not necessarily in this order.

“And how will you explain your strategy to our good Lord Uller?”

The grimace of the old man told him the Lord of Sandstone had visibly not thought that far.

**Queen Baela Targaryen**

The Riverlands were able to recover miraculously quickly from all the dragonfire several Targaryen mounts had breathed during the last war. The earth, which had been black and desolated a couple of years ago, was now covered by brilliant green grass and flowers. A few trees were timidly growing here and there, promise that in a few decades the destroyed coves may found worthy successors. To the east, the Green Fork had regained strength and power, and there had been concern from the smallfolk nearby that the huge river was going to overflow with the last spring rains, though this had fortunately not happened.

Yes, the Riverlands and the fertile lands of the Trident were day per day becoming a land where if life was not a pleasure, at least it was taking an acceptable direction. The lands were divided between green and blue, and while she couldn’t see it with her eyes, Baela knew the young and the old were returning to the fields, building scarecrows to prevent the birds from eating the seeds, and the abandoned fields were returned to their cultivation duties.

With her head leaning against the chest of her husband, the Black Queen watched as Moondancer tried to catch butterflies with its front paws. The yellow and white nimble flyers had decided the scales of her bonded were perfect to rest, and the loud sniffs were not sufficient to scare them.

“Your dragon is losing against butterflies,” Addam said.

“Remind me to give him more exercises in the days to come for this shameful defeat,” Baela replied before asking and receiving a long kiss on her lips.

They stayed like this for a long time, husband and wife, her head on his chest and caring about nothing but enjoying the sun and the blue sky. This early in spring, the afternoon under the sun was neither too warm nor too cold, and they had abandoned the furred coats and most of the winter clothes a fortnight ago.

There was no Council for the next three days – her bannersmen were all dispersed across the Riverlands and the Vale, and she didn’t fancy rushing in every direction to watch their successes and their failures. Plenty of time to practise other activities she had never been able to enjoy before her departure from Dragonstone.

It took two or three turn of hourglasses, but unavoidably the matters of the realm found back their way in the conversation.

“Dorne is warmer than the Riverlands these days,” her Consort told her, caressing her silver hairs. Of all her features, Addam had confessed easily he preferred them. According to his many compliments, they combined the brilliance of the noble metal with the touch of silk.

“The fires of war are always warm,” the Targaryen Queen stopped smiling after this remark. “And while you control them in the beginning, these flames are by their very essence uncontrollable. You know when they start; you never know when they will be extinguished.”

Rhaenyra and Aegon had forgotten that, or not cared in the first place. And the realms, both Green and Black, still paid the price for this short-sightedness today.

“Many Lords and their knights were curiously eager to propose a few rides south to test the defences of our Green neighbours.”

“You noticed it, didn’t you?” Baela chuckled without humour, before continuing more soberly. “I don’t really care if they feel the call for war in their hearts and heads. We really need to build and fill to the brim as many granaries as possible this year. The best maesters we have in our employ think we have something like three years before the next autumn, but I prefer to take no risk.”

“For what it’s worth, you have the support of my Lady Mother in this.”

Baela laughed more enthusiastically. The support of her mother-in-law was not negligible, far from it.

“I’m please to hear it, my husband.”

“But you are still concerned about the harvests and the smallfolk.”

The Black Queen nodded slowly.

“The problem...no, the problems, plural...first and foremost, the councillors are still unable to tell me how many men, women and children were killed in the civil war. I always knew it was bad, but our patrols, our tax collectors, our messengers and our errant maesters are still finding graves and destroyed hamlets. We may have lost every gain of population the reigns of my uncle and my great-great-uncle gave us. We badly need the smallfolk population to increase and it comes with plentiful harvests. I don’t want to see more children to starve.”

“And the second?”

“There is nothing in this world that can prevent a dragon from setting aflame half of the kingdom if his master feels ruthless to try. My father tried to catch Vhagar, and failed. We can’t stop Tessarion from doing the same thing all over again. We would catch the Blue Queen in time, but not before tens of thousands smallfolk and hundreds of fields would be ruined.”

Addam didn’t tell her she was wrong, so Baela supposed her arguments were not devoid of good points.

“Do you think the war in the south will last years?” the young woman asked her husband. “Lord Cregan is convinced that if the Dornish play their strengths well, they can bleed and cause plenty of problems to Highgarden and Storm’s End for half a decade...”

“But they must play their strengths perfectly for that,” Addam warned. “And the Dornish are not you or your sister, Baela. They did not grow up with dragons.” Moondancer raised his head in the distance at the word ‘dragon’ before turning his head and returning his butterfly-catch games. “They have no idea how big an advantage a flying mount provides, and I don’t think they care very much about the harvests and the practicality of their wars. Otherwise, they would have tried to declare war after one harvest of two.”

“Even at the cost of surprise?”

Addam snorted.

“All the spies we have in the South confirm the Green King flew south on his Blue Queen as the first rumours of war arrived to our ears. Correct me if I’m wrong, but that doesn’t look much to me like he was caught off-guard by the Dornish attacks.”

“No, he wasn’t.” Baela closed her eyes for a dozen heartbeats, enjoying the caresses on her hair. “We will send more spies to the South. We have not the gold or the silver to afford a war this year, but if the Dornish and the Greens bleed each other for two or three years, we may have an opportunity to improve our situation.” The Black Queen bit her lip and admitted to Addam what she would never dare to admit in public to her councillors and bannersmen. “I really want the gold of the Westerlands, Addam. The Iron Islands are a bunch of ruins and degenerate pirates, and the Vale and the North have plenty iron deposits. The Crownlands have proven they could be the worst of turncloaks, and I’m not really keen in paying the price for the error of my predecessors. Conquering the Reach would force me to exterminate some of the biggest Houses of the region, and its potential as a granary has been savaged by the war and the Iron Fever. The Stormlands hate my guts.”

“I don’t think the Westerlands are too fond of anything reminding them the Black Dragon, the Starks and the Tullys. Or anything involving Black Dragons, Winter Wolves and ‘River Lads’.”

“It’s their gold I want,” Baela moaned piteously. “And I suppose, to give the Stranger and the Lannisters their due, the silver, the rubies and the gemstones that make Lannisport and Casterly Rock the masters of jewellery and wealth dominating Westeros and beyond.”

When this world had been created, it looked like the Gods had blessed the Westerlands with an absurd amount of ore and precious gems. And after that they had buried half of the remaining gold at their disposal in the entrails of the Rock.

It was unfair. She was forced to make hundreds of bargains and trade arrangements with powers on the other side of the Narrow Sea to get a handful of the gold the Lannisters used every day.

“I don’t think Moondancer is big enough to challenge the defences of the Rock.”

“I quite agree. In fact, I don’t think Moondancer, Sheepstealer and Morning will be enough, even when my dragon’s sister will be in age to be considered battle-ready.” The purple-eyed dragonrider admitted. “Casterly Rock is not something the dragons are really able to destroy. We would need a long conventional siege to force the Lannisters to surrender.”

And to have that the conquest of the Westerlands the destruction of every Green army nearby would be necessary....it would be, sure as the sun rose in the east every morning, hellishly expensive.

“And have you tried...other options?” her husband inquired as he placed his hands over her breasts.

“Carefully,” the rider of Moondancer answered with a satisfied smile. “I will remind you I have seven Kingsguards and a dragon to help me subdue you if you do not please me...”

“That sounds definitely like a challenge, your Grace...” and for the next couple of days, the subject of the Dornish War was not spoken anymore.

**Author’s note**: The new Dornish War has begun. As you can see, the one-sided triumph Lord Wyl and his friends have promised to the soldiers may have been...a little bit optimistic.

It might not seem like it, but fighting a dragon when you have none under your command is harder than you believe...

More links on the Dance is not Over:

P a treon: www. p a treon Antony444

Alternate History: www .alternatehistory forum /threads /asoiaf-the-dance-is-not-over.391415