

G.O Thrones 111

Chapter 111: Heir's Resignation

Today's meeting was a clear demonstration of King Viserys' authority. Since the War for the Stepstones, the royal family's prestige had waned.

With the change of the heir, it was time for the Targaryen to reassert their dominance before the nobility.

Hearing the King's speech, many nobles quickly understood his intention. Their eyes were fixed on the dark dragon hovering above.

The dragon had a leather strap around its neck, attached to a saddle. A small figure sat on the dragon's back, commanding the beast.

"Cannibal, Dracarys!" Rhaegar spoke in High Valyrian, issuing the command. He tightened his grip on the reins and scanned the crowd below, who were clearly restless.

"Roar..." Cannibal, sensing his master's command, unleashed a torrent of green dragonfire that cut across the sky like a blazing river. To the onlookers, the flames seemed endless.

In a dramatic display, the pitch-black dragon surged into the sea of flames, the small figure on its back unscathed. Rhaegar stayed put, safe from the dragonfire thanks to his special dragon-riding suit.

"Land, Cannibal," Rhaegar said softly once the flames died down, showing off the dragon's impressive power. Cannibal's green eyes twinkled with amusement as it looked down at the crowd below.

The dragon changed direction, diving headfirst toward the ground. Cannibal was much bigger and stronger than Syrax, which was still in its juvenile stage. It was like a storm, capable of overturning chariots.

As Cannibal swooped down over the Red Keep, the wind from its descent began to whip through the back garden.

The gathered nobles couldn't help but glance nervously at the King, realizing the gravity of the situation.

"Roar..." Just as the black dragon was about to crash into the castle, it suddenly stopped in its tracks, roaring at the sky. It came down in the garden with a thud.

Luckily, the back garden was spacious enough to fit Cannibal's immense body.

Smoke rose from the ground as Cannibal landed behind the gazebo, its sheer size dwarfing Syrax.

The pavilion looked pretty small, like a mouse or a cat compared to the massive dragon, which stood towering over it. Cannibal's head reached as high as the tower, and it gave the crowd below a disdainful glance.

The dragon's presence was pretty intimidating. Nobles who dared to look directly at it couldn't help but back away in fear, especially when they saw the small figure on its back—a boy less than ten years old.

The sight of a child commanding such a fearsome beast was unsettling. It made you feel like you had a sword hanging over your head, ready to strike at any moment.

Rhaegar, perched on Cannibal's back, remained silent, his gaze distant.

"Roar..." Cannibal raised its head and let out a loud roar, spewing green dragon flames into the sky. The air heated up fast, turning the winter chill into a stifling summer heat, making everyone sweat.

"Alright, let me down, Cannibal," Rhaegar said in a calm voice, breaking the tension and halting the dragon's display.

"Roar..." Cannibal stopped its flames, folded its wings, and laid down. The heat had also affected King Viserys, who wiped sweat from his forehead while beaming with pride.

"Rhaegar, let the lords see your face," Viserys commanded loudly.

"Yes, Father," Rhaegar replied, getting up from his horse. He hadn't fastened the chains, and Cannibal, attuned to his master's will, ensured Rhaegar's safety without them. The saddle was more for comfort than necessity.

Rhaegar descended gracefully using a soft ladder attached to the straps around Cannibal's neck. With a soft thud, he landed and walked from the back of the pavilion into full view of the assembly.

Dressed in a sleek dragon-scale-patterned outfit, Rhaegar's clean, white face, silver hair, and purple eyes of the Targaryen lineage contrasted sharply with the menacing black dragon outside.

Leaving Alicent's embrace, Viserys took Rhaegar's small hand and stood tall before the nobles, his pride evident.

"My lords, behold your future monarch, the new king of the realm," he proclaimed loudly.

The nobles understood the situation clearly under the imposing authority of the two dragons. They erupted into thunderous applause, acknowledging their future king.

The sound of their applause echoed, confirming their acceptance of Rhaegar's status ascension.

After a round of applause and cheers, Viserys raised his hand to calm the nobles, whose faces showed a mix of emotions.

He patted Rhaegar's shoulder and encouraged him, "Go, Rhaegar, help Rhaenyra dismount."

Rhaegar nodded and glanced at Rhaenyra, who was still sitting proudly on Syrax's back. She needed to maintain her dignity in this important moment.

Rhaegar walked over to Syrax, looking up at his sister's calm face. As he reached Syrax's neck, he petted the curious dragon. He slowly dropped to one knee and said, "Rhaenyra, I'm here to help you."

Rhaenyra turned her head and looked down at Rhaegar with a neutral expression. After a brief pause, she undid the chain around her waist, rose from the saddle, and climbed down the ladder.

When she reached the ground, Rhaenyra extended her hand. Rhaegar took it, kissed the back of her hand lightly, and whispered, "Thank you, sister."

"Rise, brother," Rhaenyra responded, pulling him up gracefully. Hand in hand, they walked towards the gazebo, matching each other's pace despite their height difference.

When they got to the pavilion, Rhaenyra saluted Viserys and Alicent, then stepped forward to address the crowd before Lyonel could.

She scanned the assembly and spoke with passion, "My lords, I'm honored to have you here today for the heir changing ceremony."

"Here and now, in front of you all, I, Rhaenyra Targaryen, eldest daughter of King Viserys I, Princess of Dragonstone, and former heir to the Iron Throne, solemnly declare that I relinquish my claim to the throne in favor of my brother Rhaegar. I pledge my lifelong allegiance to him, to support him, and to work together to usher in a new era for the Targaryen dynasty."

With that, Rhaenyra confidently raised Rhaegar's small hand high, sealing her declaration.

Chapter 112: The Hightower House

As Rhaenyra's declaration echoed through the hall, applause started up, with Jeyne Arryn and the Vale nobles leading the way, followed by the Riverlands and Reach Houses of the Tullys and Tyrells.

These were the staunchest supporters of the Targaryen crown.

The princess's willingness to transfer the title of heir to her brother sent a strong message of unity. The Targaryen House showed no signs of internal strife or scandal. Today marked an honorable and orderly transition.

"Well done, Rhaenyra!" Jeyne Arryn's clear voice called out, her eyes filled with pity for her cousin and ally. Both women were powerful in their own right and supported each other politically. Jeyne had no choice but to respect Rhaenyra's decision.

As the applause died down, Lyonel Strong looked at Rhaenyra with a sad expression. "Oh well, my role here has been taken over," he thought.

Yet, he stepped forward with solemnity and addressed the nobles. "My lords, the Princess and the Prince have arrived. Please proceed to the Throne Hall for the ceremony."

The replacement of the heir was a significant event, requiring a dignified and solemn ceremony. It wasn't enough for the heirs to simply agree; the kingdom needed to witness the formalities.

"Come along, my children," Viserys said, approaching Rhaenyra and Rhaegar, taking their hands. Rhaenyra sensed the affection in her father's eyes.

"You've done well, my girl. What you've lost today will be compensated," Viserys assured her, his voice firm as he squeezed her hand. Rhaenyra's sacrifice proved her loyalty and commitment to the unity of the Targaryen House, keeping external threats at bay. Viserys was proud of her, his guilt for her deepening.

Rhaenyra smiled gently, slipping her hand out of her father's and instead holding Rhaegar's. "Father, it would be better if you accompanied the Queen," she said softly.

Her father's belated affection and hesitation hurt her, but she kept it to herself. The offer meant a life of peace and security, but her father's newfound love only made her resent him more.

For now, all she wanted was to hold Rhaegar's hand tightly and fulfill her vow.

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The heir changing ceremony commenced in the solemn Throne Room, where members of the royal family and nobles from across the realms had gathered.

The High Septon of the Faith of the Seven stood before them, making the official proclamation under the divine gaze of the Seven.

The title of heir was formally transferred from Rhaenyra to Rhaegar.

Seizing the moment, Rhaenyra announced that she would no longer consider marrying outside her family and pledged to groom Rhaegar until he came of age.

This announcement was a great disappointment to many nobles who had long coveted her hand in marriage.

Viserys hadn't expected Rhaenyra to make that announcement, but he didn't object. Instead, he smiled and nodded in agreement, confirming that he wouldn't get involved in her marriage plans.

For Viserys, it was important to keep the pure dragon bloodline going, and Rhaenyra's decision was perfect for him.

After this unexpected turn of events, Viserys placed the crown on Rhaegar's head and got the oath of allegiance from the lords.

Dressed in black robes adorned with the emblems of the realm, Rhaegar surveyed the room with a composed demeanor, his raised arms signifying his acceptance of the new title.

From this moment on, he was the heir, just as Rhaenyra had once been.

Viserys was thrilled beyond words as he witnessed the moment. This was the prince he had always dreamed of.

The coronation was complete, and as the sun began to set, the nobles were invited to the banquet hall, where a sumptuous feast awaited them.

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Candlelight and bonfires cast a warm glow on the tables laden with food and wine. Viserys was at the head of the hall, with Rhaegar and Rhaenyra to his left and Lyonel, the Hand of the King, to his right.

After the ceremony, Alicent excused herself to tend to Aemond, who was crying. Meanwhile, the nobles enjoyed the feast, eating, drinking, and chatting away.

Viserys took in the scene with a sense of satisfaction, occasionally chatting with Lyonel in a friendly manner. It was a day of triumph for him, and he wanted to share it with everyone.

The only regret was the absence of the Velaryon House. Sea Snake Corlys had promised to attend, but they had not yet arrived.

"Rhaegar, try this," Rhaenyra said, offering her brother a piece of roasted meat.

Rhaegar, dressed in ceremonial attire, lounged back in his chair with a bored expression, accepting the food from his sister. He was still adjusting to his new status as heir and was enjoying the attention from the former one.

After eating several pieces of meat, Rhaegar felt overwhelmed and gulped down some grape juice. Rhaenyra teased, "The heir should pay attention to his image, Rhaegar."

"I haven't even felt the privileges of being Crown Prince, and already I'm being scolded?" Rhaegar joked. "Look at all these people—how many of them do you think will actually listen to me?"

Rhaenyra replied with a self-deprecating smile, "How many do you think listened to me when I was the heir?"

Rhaegar smirked but said nothing. He understood that being the heir was merely a title and that real power was still far away.

Just then, there was an announcement at the door. It was Lord Hobert Hightower from Oldtown. Many nobles had been disheveled by the two dragons' arrival and had applied to return to their residences to change their attire.

The Hightower delegation entered, led by the Lords and Ladies, but one figure stood out even more: Ser Otto Hightower, Queen Alicent's father.

Viserys maintained a composed expression as his old acquaintance approached, waiting patiently for the customary greetings. Lord Hobert offered his blessings, followed by Ser Otto Hightower's formal greeting.

Viserys responded calmly, showing no sign of discomfort or regret over their past conflicts.

Rhaegar's attention was drawn to the newcomers.

He tugged at Rhaenyra's skirt, pointed to Lord Hobert descending the steps, and whispered, "Look, it's that big-nosed fool, I remember him."

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra quickly covered his mouth, her eyes giving him a stern look to let him know to watch what he say

Rhaegar pulled her hand away and whispered into her ear, "Isn't that man a supporter of Aegon?"

He recalled the scene at the Kingswood hunt when Ser Hobert had hailed Prince Aegon. At the time, he hadn't recognized him.

It turned out to be Lord Hightower of Aegon's mother's house.

Rhaenyra lowered her voice, "You're the heir, and your succession is secure. Aegon can't challenge you."

Rhaegar's status as the eldest son was far stronger than her own had been as the eldest daughter. Aegon, who once had some hope, couldn't surpass Rhaegar in age or legitimacy.

Rhaegar glanced at Otto Hightower, a former Hand of the King for two terms, as he chatted with Rhaenyra.

Viserys raised his glass and greeted, "It's been a long time, Otto."

"I'm glad you're well, and that you've chosen an excellent heir, Your Grace," Otto replied respectfully, maintaining his elegant demeanor.

Their conversation was brief before Otto followed his elder brother into the banquet.

As the Hightower family settled in, another noble rose to make a toast.

Two women sat at the table of the Vale family—Lady Jeyne and a mature woman dressed as an noblewoman.

"Your Grace..." The Lady began to stand, but another figure quickly stepped forward with a glass of wine.

"Congratulations, Your Grace," he said, "You have a brave and fearless prince as your heir, worthy of the dragon blood."

Chapter 113: Lady Rhea

A blonde, curly-haired nobleman named Jason strode forward and saluted the king.

Rhaegar squinted at him and nodded. "Thank you, Lord Jason."

Jason smiled and lifted his chin. "Your Grace, this exchange of heirs is truly grand, befitting a prince."

Viserys laughed. "Of course, Rhaegar is my eldest son, the future king. I want this feast to go down in history."

Jason glanced at the empty seat to the King's right. "Where is the Queen? I was hoping to greet her in person."

"The Queen is still preparing for the festivities," Viserys replied casually.

Jason took the opportunity to comment. "That's why men go to war; women would never make it to the battlefield in time."

Turning to Rhaenyra, he asked, "With the burden of being the heir removed, I wonder what the Princess has planned for the future?" He was still thinking of marrying a Targaryen princess.

Viserys opened his mouth to reply, but Rhaegar interrupted. "Lord Jason, what war have you started? Must I ride the dragons to Lannisport?"

Rhaenyra gave him a sideways glance and silently took his hand.

Rhaegar smiled and looked at Jason, who looked a bit stunned.

Jason hesitated. "Uh... I haven't started any war. There's no need to trouble the prince."

"Really? That's a shame," Rhaegar replied, feigning disappointment. "Do you have any future plans for war? I heard the Ironborn often disturb the coastline."

"The Ironborn are just foolish pirates. The soldiers in the harbor can handle them," Jason replied, sounding perplexed. "With your honor as a prince, you shouldn't be bothered by the Ironborn."

"I see. Lord Jason is truly a lord well-versed in military affairs. I admire you," Rhaegar said, raising his cup in a toast.

Jason looked at the fruity grape juice in the prince's glass and frowned, but he raised his glass to share the drink.

After finishing the wine, Jason, aware that his presence is unwelcome to the prince, left, his mood noticeably dampened.

Watching his retreating back, Rhaenyra whispered into Rhaegar's ear. "An egomaniac, I can deal with that."

"I just can't stand his stupid face," Rhaegar shrugged. "He dared to covet my sister. I'm afraid seawater from Lannisport got into his head."

As soon as Jason left, the Lady of the Vale, who had been holding her tongue and wanted to speak earlier, quickly approached.

"Your Grace, Rhea Royce of Runestone has come to visit with the prince. I offer my blessings to you and your children," the Lady said, raising her glass.

"Thank you, Lady Rhea," Viserys responded. Rhaegar and Rhaenyra said the same thing, with equal respect.

The countess before them was no ordinary person. She was Daemon Targaryen's wife, Viserys' brother, and thus Rhaegar's aunt by marriage. As is proper, they should address her as sister-in-law and aunt.

Rhaegar took a moment to look at Lady Rhea. Her long brown hair framed a slim figure.

Though she wasn't conventionally beautiful, her features had a certain rugged grace, exuding a dry heroic spirit. She was a far cry from the unattractive figure Daemon had described.

Lady Rhea took a sip of wine and said solemnly, "Your Grace, Daemon has committed a grave crime. While I bear no guilt, I feel a shared responsibility."

"Don't worry, Lady Rhea," Viserys replied politely. "Daemon's sins are his own. They won't touch you."

Lady Rhea shook her head. "Your Grace, I know what I am about to say may sound treasonous, but I beg your understanding."

"What is it you wish to say?" Viserys asked, sensing the seriousness of the situation.

Lady Rhea spoke with heavy heart. "I have been married to Daemon for ten years, but our marriage exists in name only. He finds me lacking in beauty and refuses to be with me. The scandal has spread across the continent."

Rhaegar sat up straighter and listened intently. This was Daemon's scandal, and he needed to hear the details.

Lady Rhea continued, "I am the Lady of Runestone, and this stigma has haunted me for years. Now that Daemon has committed treason, I implore you to end our marriage and honor your loyal subject."

She finished up quickly, as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. She stared at the king with a determined look in her eyes.

"You wish to dissolve the marriage?" Viserys asked, his face grim.

"No! Daemon never considered me his wife," Lady Rhea said.

Viserys clenched his glass, his eyes fixed on Lady Rhea, his breathing becoming more labored. Daemon was indeed a scoundrel, and Viserys hated him for it. But he was also his brother.

If Viserys granted Lady Rhea's request, it would bring shame not only to Daemon but also to the royal family, making them the subject of ridicule.

For the honor of the crown and out of lingering familial loyalty, Viserys hesitated. He didn't want to agree to Lady Rhea's plea for a divorce.

The atmosphere grew tense. Rhaenyra looked at Lady Rhea, filled with both indignation and sympathy. She was noble Lady, who'd been married for years and was the subject of endless jokes.

Leaning close to Rhaegar, she whispered through gritted teeth, "Daemon is scum. Don't ever become like him."

"You're wrong to even compare him to me," Rhaegar replied, clearly annoyed.

Viserys remained silent for a long time before finally speaking in a deep voice, "Lady Rhea, Daemon has not yet been apprehended. Can we wait until he is, so that you and he can personally resolve this matter?"

As an older brother, he was reluctant to make the decision about Daemon's fate while he was away.

Lady Rhea hesitated, wanting desperately to implore the king to end the marriage immediately. She couldn't bear being Daemon's wife for another moment and wanted to be free as soon as possible.

"Lady Rhea, my father has already approved your request. All you have to do is wait until Daemon is captured," Rhaegar interjected, seeing his father's difficulty in making a decision.

Lady Rhea looked at the young prince, her eyes filled with suspicion.

Rhaegar smiled and said, "Runestone has always been a loyal supporter of the royal family. The royal family will not humiliate its followers. Daemon has committed grave errors, and this marriage should end."

Lady Rhea nodded and asked the king, "Your Grace, is what the prince says true?"

Viserys, looking sorrowful, replied, "Yes, Rhaegar speaks for me. When Daemon is brought to justice, you may settle the matter as you see fit."

"Thank you, Your Grace." Rhea was thrilled and turned to Rhaegar. "Thank you for your selflessness, Prince."

"Selflessness?" Rhaegar frowned. What did she mean by that? Was she implying he was betraying his own family?

Seeing his reaction, Lady Rhea quickly tried to clarify her words. "I apologize, that's not what I meant..."

Rhaegar looked at her, still confused.

"I'll take my leave now, Your Grace," Lady Rhea said hastily, realizing she was only making things worse. She made her way down the steps, her face flushed with embarrassment.

Rhaenyra turned to look at Rhaegar, who met her gaze.

"I understand why Daemon doesn't like her," Rhaegar muttered with frustration.

"Uh huh," Rhaenyra smiled, averting her gaze.

A woman with a such sharp tongue was indeed not easy to like.

Chapter 114: The Sea Snake and Daemon

The banquet continued.

Rhaegar took his seat and greeted one noble after another, his smile growing more strained by the minute. Just as his face was starting to hurt from all the smiling, the welcoming drums sounded.

"Lord Corlys of House Velaryon, Lord of the Tides, Master of Driftmark, his wife, Princess Rhaenys Targaryen, and their children and heirs..."

The herald's voice echoed through the hall, and the doors swung open.

A crowd entered the hall, drawing the attention of everyone present. The noisy banquet hall fell silent as many gazes turned towards the newcomers.

"The Sea Snake..." Rhaegar murmured softly, equally curious about the man his father had spoken so much about.

Seated facing the door, he had a clear view of the group. Leading them was a middle-aged man with silver hair and dark skin, his eyes deep and his demeanor calm.

Beside him was a striking woman with black hair streaked with silver, her face proud and regal. The two walked hand in hand.

Following behind were a pair of silver-haired young men and women, both dark-skinned and strikingly beautiful.

"Does Valyria have any black-skinned descendants?" Rhaegar thought to himself, intrigued.

The group reached the center of the banquet hall, and all eyes were on them.

Corlys stepped forward and bowed slightly to Viserys, saying, "Your Grace, we're sorry we couldn't make it to the assembly on time. We had to travel a long way."

"Hehe, I didn't see you during the day. I thought the Velaryon House wouldn't come," Viserys responded with a smile, nodding at Rhaenys. "Cousin."

"Cousin," Rhaenys replied with a faint smile.

Viserys then turned to Rhaegar and introduced him, "Come, Lord Corlys, meet the kingdom's new heir and swear your allegiance."

He was eager to see the Sea Snake's reaction.

Corlys' gaze fell on the young prince. He frowned slightly, then said, "Your Grace, you have made the right choice."

He spoke earnestly. A male heir indeed brought more security than a princess.

Corlys knelt on one knee and swore his allegiance plainly, showing no reluctance.

Rhaegar rose from his seat and approached Corlys, extending a hand and smiling, "Rise, Lord Corlys, I accept your allegiance."

Corlys took his hand, rising to his full height, and whispered, "Prince, I hope you will be a wise ruler."

"I will, my lord," Rhaegar replied confidently.

Turning to Rhaenys, he said, "Aunt, this is the first time we meet, and I welcome you and my cousins. Please, take your seats."

"It may be our first meeting, but I have long been familiar with you," Rhaenys replied, touching her nephew's head, disregarding the formalities of a ruler and subject.

Laenor and Laena stepped forward, greeting warmly, "Rhaegar, congratulations on becoming the heir."

As Rhaegar exchanged pleasantries with the Velaryon children, Rhaenys approached the main table.

She raised a glass of wine, first toasting Viserys. "Cousin," she said with a faint smile, to which Viserys responded in kind.

Then, she turned to Rhaenyra, her tone dripping with sarcasm, "I told you that you would be replaced. You are indeed useless."

Her words were filled with bitterness. She had once been a candidate for the throne but had been passed over for Viserys. Seeing Rhaenyra replaced by Rhaegar felt like history repeating itself, but with a male heir instead.

Rhaenyra's expression cooled at the comment. She replied blandly, "Aunt, Rhaegar is my brother, and I willingly gave up my seat for him."

"Is this how you lie to yourself?" Rhaenys asked, her eyes filled with pity.

Rhaenyra clenched her fists and replied calmly, "Isn't that how you've managed all these years, knowing the heart of the matter isn't with us?"

Rhaenys sighed, acknowledging the truth in Rhaenyra's words. "You're right. The system itself is flawed," she admitted. Then, changing the subject, she asked, "You are not young. Do you need to find a husband to depend on?"

"No need. Rhaegar will not treat me harshly," Rhaenyra replied firmly.

Rhaenys seemed a bit down, but she agreed, "That's fine. You can follow the family tradition."

Despite her harsh words, Rhaenys felt a kinship with her niece, both having suffered under the same system. She admired Rhaenyra's strength, even if she didn't show it openly. Rhaegar found himself enjoying a good conversation with Laenor, who seemed to take a liking to him.

At that moment, a new figure entered through the still-open doors. The man had short silver hair, wore black leather armor, and bore a cynical smile.

The banquet continued with its usual pomp and circumstance until a sudden commotion interrupted the revelry.

Bang...

Viserys' face twisted with anger as he slammed the table, shouting, "Daemon, you bastard, how dare you show up in front of me!?"

Rhaegar was startled by his father's outburst and turned to see who had entered. His expression hardened when he recognized the visitor. Daemon Targaryen, the very man who was on the wanted list.

Daemon was standing at the door, eating a piece of bread with salt. As he strolled in, the room fell silent.

Swish, swish...

Two guards unsheathed their swords and positioned them at Daemon's neck, their expressions grim.

Daemon swallowed the last bite of bread, raised his hands in a mock gesture of surrender, and smiled faintly. "Brother, I am here enjoying the rights of a guest."

"You are a criminal and deserve no such rights," Viserys retorted angrily. "Arrest him and throw him in the dungeon."

The sword blades pressed against Daemon's skin, and he winced slightly. Still, he managed to say, "For tonight, at least, I'm here as a guest."

With that, he unsheathed the Dark Sister, his Valyrian steel sword, and offered it with both hands.

Viserys sneered at the gesture. "You fool. You have no honor in my eyes."

The hall was filled with tension, and many of the guests had stopped eating, their eyes fixed on the unfolding drama. Viserys' fury was palpable. This was the man who had almost killed his son.

"Your Grace, Daemon has eaten your bread and wine. It's against the gods' laws to harm a guest under your roof," Corlys Velaryon interjected.

Viserys shot Corlys a look that said it all. "Lord Corlys, did he come here with your family?"

Daemon's timing was suspicious, coming so close on the heels of the Velaryons. Viserys was already suspicious of Daemon and Corlys' relationship.

Corlys met the king's gaze evenly. "I don't know what crime Prince Daemon has committed, but he's your blood. A kinslayer is cursed by the gods."

"The kinslayer is him!" Viserys shouted, his agitation mounting.

Daemon spoke up, "Brother, all our kin are alive and well. I have killed no one."

"Shut your mouth, or I'll rip out your tongue," Viserys snapped, his eyes blazing.

Daemon fell silent, lowering his head.

The tension was palpable, and the festive atmosphere had turned icy. Guests looked around uncomfortably, their earlier smiles now frozen.

Seeing the need to defuse the situation, Lyonel Strong rose and approached the king, speaking in a low voice, "Your Grace, Daemon has walked into your grasp. There will be ample time to execute him later."

"Are you suggesting I let this murderer attend the banquet?" Viserys replied, his tone indicating disgust.

"Today is the heir changing ceremony, and nobles from all over the continent are gathered here. It is not fitting to spill blood on such an occasion," Lyonel advised, considering the consequences of a public execution.

Chapter 115: Black and Green

Viserys's face fell upon hearing the news of Daemon's imprisonment. While it was a relief to have him detained, the scandal of the royal family's infighting was now at risk of becoming public knowledge.

Rhaenya, eager to prevent rumors of internal conflict, had expressed her support for Rhaegar's claim. The tranquility of the day could not be shattered by Daemon's antics.

Rhaegar approached his father and tugged at his sleeve. Viserys looked down at his son, confusion etched on his face.

"Father," Rhaegar whispered, "the rights of guests cannot be violated. Confiscate his sword and detain him immediately after the banquet."

No matter what Daemon and the Sea Snake might be up to, Daemon's presence in King's Landing made it tough to get away. There was no need to let their anger get the better of them.

Viserys looked at his son for a long moment before turning to Lyonel for advice.

Lyonel nodded. "The prince is right. Daemon can't escape."

Taking a deep breath, Viserys snorted. "Very well, let him have one more comfortable night." He then ordered, "Confiscate his sword and let him in."

"Yes, Your Grace," the guards responded. They took the Dark Sister, Daemon's Valyrian steel sword, and thoroughly searched him for any hidden weapons.

Daemon cooperated, smiling as he said, "Brother, I am here only to send my blessings for my great nephew's celebration."

"Thank you, uncle," Rhaegar replied coldly, signaling the guards to take the sword.

"Find a corner to sit in and grab some wine before the feast ends," Viserys ordered with contempt.

Daemon spread his arms helplessly. "I am your brother."

"You're not worthy," Viserys shot back, not even looking at him.

Daemon looked around the room for a place to sit, but was interrupted by a loud thump.

Lady Rhea rose from her seat, glaring at Daemon with fury. "Rhea, sit down," Jeyne whispered, trying to prevent her from making a scene.

"Hmph!" Rhea obeyed reluctantly, shooting Daemon a look of pure disgust before sitting down.

Daemon smirked. "Isn't this my lady? Concerned about your husband?"

"Vile!" Rhea spat, cursing him.

Daemon laughed coldly and found an empty seat. He wasn't supposed to be here, but he couldn't resist the urge to meet his nephew, the new heir.

As Daemon settled, Viserys tried to restore the festive atmosphere. "All of you..."

Bang...

The door opened again. Alicent, dressed in a striking green gown, walked into the hall, holding Aegon in one hand and Helaena in the other. Her calm, assured demeanor drew everyone's attention.

The room fell silent. Green was a significant color, particularly for House Hightower. When Oldtown called its bannermen to war, the lighthouse on the Hightower would light up green.

Viserys understood the implication of the color and looked puzzled.

Rhaegar, keeping his gaze on Alicent, commented, "Your Grace, your dress is beautiful."

Alicent smiled gently. "I chose it carefully. It's the only one that suits tonight's mood."

"I'm glad you dressed up for my celebration, but I don't like the color of your dress," Rhaegar said, glancing at the Hightower table. "Change it. There is still time."

Otto looked puzzled, not expecting his usually soft-hearted daughter to make such a bold statement. Hobert, on the other hand, seemed pleased, waving to Aegon beside Alicent.

Viserys spoke in a low voice, "Alicent, I left my handkerchief in my room. Fetch it for me."

He did not wish to see his queen in a green dress; it felt like a slight against him.

Alicent approached the main seat, let go of her children's hands, and wiped Viserys's mouth with a handkerchief. "I like this dress and won't change it."

Viserys grabbed her wrist. "You must."

"Unless you want me to remove it right now, I must decline," Alicent replied firmly, her eyes steely.

She knew precisely what her family wanted and was exhausted from their manipulations.

She had endured enough; the sleepless nights and constant strain had worn her down. She was tired of merely surviving in the shadows.

Now, it was time to stand up for herself, live openly and boldly, and fight for her children's future.

Viserys, realizing her determination, let go of her hand. His mood, already soured by Daemon's appearance, worsened.

Alicent ignored her husband's displeasure and took her seat beside him without acknowledging Rhaegar.

Rhaegar scanned the room, his expression unreadable. "Rhaegar, get some rest," Rhaenyra suggested, trying to comfort him.

Rhaegar shook his head, a wry smile on his lips. "Someone's in a hurry," he muttered.

He wasn't happy, but he had been prepared for this. Rhaenyra's time as heir had sown discord, and now as the heir, he had to deal with the fallout.

When he became crown prince, the law prevailed.

And the demons lurking in the shadows will be unable to bear it; they will reveal their fangs.

This is good—it's crucial to know who the enemy is.

The feast continued, but there was a bit of an awkward atmosphere. Viserys tried to lighten the mood with a speech, and then the music started and people started dancing.

Rhaegar stayed seated, not in the mood for festivities.

The Kingsguard was carrying the Dark Sister away, but Rhaegar intervened, requesting to let him see it.

Viserys didn't refuse this time; he had contemplated gifting the ancestral sword to his eldest son.

Daemon isn't worthy of it.

The Kingsguard brought the Dark Sister to him, and he examined it closely.

The system beeped. "Quest initiated: explore the Valyrian steel sword, Dark Sister."

Rhaegar smiled slightly, his mood improving. He placed the Dark Sister on the table, his hand resting on the hilt.

Dark Sisters

Exploration progress: 0.5%

The music played, and the earlier tension dissipated as people found dance partners. However, Rhaenyra declined several invitations, citing feeling unwell as her reason.

Among them stand Jason and Tyland, the twin brothers of House Lannister, alongside Lyonel's eldest son, Harwin Strong, among many others.

Eventually, frustrated and annoyed, she left the party early.

Rhaegar watched her leave before turning his attention back to the hall. He observed Daemon dancing with Rhaenys's daughter, Laena, showing affection and Alicent laughing with her family.

Everything seemed normal, but Rhaegar could sense the undercurrents of tension and rivalry. The banquet continued, but the night's events had revealed much about who stood with him and who stood against him.

Chapter 116: Undercurrents

As midnight approached, the ball showed no signs of winding down, with nobles still enjoying the social festivities.

Rhaegar, feeling the weight of the long night, rested his head on his hand, battling fatigue.

Footsteps echoed, and suddenly Daemon appeared, catching Rhaegar's suspicious gaze.

With hands raised in mock surrender, Daemon chuckled, "Great nephew, I haven't yet offered my congratulations on your ascension to heir."

Rhaegar's brow furrowed. "Why are you here?"

"I felt like it. Do I need more reason?" Daemon replied nonchalantly.

"As you wish, you and your Dark Sisters are welcome," Rhaegar remarked, casting a glance at the precious sword.

Daemon playfully asked, "Can you even lift it with your height?"

Rhaegar remained calm, unsure how to respond to such audacity.

Could anyone be so bold?

After a moment's thought, Rhaegar raised his glass. "Uncle, I appreciate your boldness and the help you've given my father. Here, to you."

In his mind, Daemon was already a trapped animal.

No need for harsh words.

Daemon eyed the juice in the glass and shook his head. "Children's drinks. I prefer fine wine."

Rhaegar smiled. "As heir, when I extend a courtesy, you must oblige."

"What if I decline?" Daemon smirked.

"Let's find out then."

Rhaegar replied by tipping his glass, which spilled the juice onto the floor. Daemon looked perplexed, so Rhaegar brought the glass down firmly onto the table.

There was a thump as Erryk drew his longsword and held it to Daemon's neck.

Daemon looked Erryk in the eye and gave him a disdainful look. "Are you planning to kill me?"

"I will if necessary," Erryk stated firmly.

Rhaegar poured another glass of juice and offered it to Daemon. "Here, Uncle. Have a drink."

Daemon lifted his hand, overturning the glass once more, the juice spilling out. "You're a naive little prince. Do you think I'll yield to you?"

Bang--

The cup crashed onto the tabletop once more, and Rhaegar's countenance turned icy.

Swish swish...

Two more blades emerged from their scabbards, one poised at Daemon's neck and the other at his lower back.

Daemon glanced back, finding Cole and Harrold, who had silently approached, their expressions unreadable.

Both were Kingsguard, privy to Daemon's transgressions. How could they allow a sinner to approach the prince with such impunity?

"Uncle, I'm raising my glass to you because you've been so supportive of my father," Rhaegar said, raising his glass again and tilting his head.

"I understand your thoughts. My father was merciful, but I am not. I will be the judge, ensuring you never don the Black Cloak and journey to the Wall."

Rhaegar knew his father's tendencies well, even amidst all the animosity. When push came to shove, Viserys would inevitably hesitate.

Daemon's expression shifted slightly. "You plan to send me to the Wall as a brother of the Night's Watch?"

Rhaegar replied, "Drink this, and you may live past tonight."

He gave his uncle another chance. Kinslaying was a pretty serious accusation, and he was reluctant to see his father lose a blood relative.

"I never thought that you'd despise me so much."

"Go to the Wall and try to make amends."

There was a brief silence, broken by Daemon's grin.

He was impressed by his nephew's generosity, even in trying to spare his life.

Daemon accepted the glass, sniffing the fragrant juice before bringing it close to his lips.

Viserys silently applauded the move, his eyes darting between the two.

Daemon took a tentative sip before spilling the juice onto the ground with a sigh. "Unfortunately, this isn't to my liking."

Bang--

A wine glass struck Daemon's forehead, causing him to stagger.

Viserys trembled with anger, his teeth grinding, "Get lost and savor the end of your miserable life, you heartless beast!"

"Fine, have it your way," Daemon retorted, covering his bleeding forehead as he pushed past the blocking Cole and merged into the dancing throng.

Observing his nephew's temperament, Daemon felt the night had not been in vain.

As a prominent figure in the family, his actions caught the attention of many well-meaning individuals.

At the Velaryon lineage table, Rhaenys gripped her cutlery tightly, her tone laced with venom, "You court your own demise, so don't blame others for it."

"Daemon is his own man," Jeyne reassured softly, her eyes flickering with amusement as she glanced at Rhaegar. "The heir seems to be a bit more astute than Rhaenys."

"He's the son of the late Queen Aemma Arryn and is a natural ally for you and the Vale," Yorbort analyzed.

"You're right, but I'm more intrigued by his marriage," Jeyne mused, her fingers lightly tracing her chin.

Yorbort hesitated, "The prince is only six years old, and according to Targaryen family tradition, he has a pair of sisters to choose from."

"Who knows," Jeyne chuckled.

At the head table, Viserys was breathing heavily and looked flushed with anger.

He couldn't understand why his eldest son had denied Daemon a chance at life when he himself was willing to grant it.

Must he, his own brother, be the one to sever his head?

"I'll grant you your wish, you bastard," Viserys seethed, suppressing his rage.

Rhaegar told Cole and Harrold to stand down and guard the entrance. On closer inspection, he could see that his hands were trembling slightly, and that he was breathing heavily.

But it wasn't fear or anger; it was a rush of excitement.

"Uncle, an eye for an eye," Rhaegar said.

Meanwhile, back in the Dragonpit, the roars of the dragons could be heard echoing around the circular chamber.

There were several massive dragons in there, including Vaghar, Meleys, Sea Smoke, and Syrax.

Bound by iron chains, Daemon's Blood Wyrms let out a roar of rage, its gaze sweeping the dark corners of the crypt.

Far away, a black dragon scaled the Dragonpit's wall, its movements betraying its master's emotions.

In the Banquet Hall, Rhaegar hoisted his heavy Dark Sister, bidding his father farewell with a smile, "I'll be on my way now, Father."

"Go on; the feast will continue for some time," Viserys replied, his response mild.

Rhaegar nodded, halting Erryk from following as he whispered a word in his ear.

Erryk's brows furrowed, and he nodded solemnly.

"Goodbye," Rhaegar bid him farewell before departing.

The festivities carried on, with Tully, Tyrell, and other nobles expressing their regrets upon learning of the prince's departure.

Meanwhile, Daemon, rejected by one partner after another, roamed aimlessly through the crowd.

"No dance partner?" a soft voice called from behind, as Laena approached with a smile.

Chapter 117: Dragon Attack On A Rainy Night

Daemon's gaze roved over Laena's form, appreciating her curves, exotic complexion, and seductive red lips, all of which aligned perfectly with his tastes.

He extended his hand with a smile and said, "It looks like your dance partner left you hanging."

"It does," Laena replied, intertwining her fingers with his. "But I have more pressing matters to attend to, so I guess I'll have to lower my standards and dance with you."

Daemon's eyes lit up with desire as they began their dance.

With a bold move, Laena leaned in, her ample bosom pressing against him as she spoke softly, "Have you thought about how you're going to leave?"

She inherited her mother Rhaenys's analytical nature and couldn't understand Daemon's arrogance without a plan.

"I can't divulge all my secrets, my dear," Daemon chuckled, his hand trailing down her waist, growing bolder.

"A piece of advice: the Dragonpit is now under the control of the new heir. You'd better get out of here," Laena said in a low voice.

Daemon's expression didn't change as his hand kept exploring, and his words were still ambiguous. "Then I'll have to be quick about it."

A quick glance revealed the guarded main gate, leaving him no easy means of escape without a weapon. Other passages were similarly patrolled, and he knew he was under close scrutiny from the moment he set foot in King's Landing.

As the ball went on, Daemon and Laena danced together, seeming relaxed despite the situation.

Corlys felt a twinge of unease as he observed his daughter with Daemon. Such interactions weren't good for the Velaryon House.

Rhaenys suggested, "Should we call Laena back?"

Corlys shook his head. "We arrived here with Daemon; we can't deny our association."

"Daemon won't find it easy to slip away," Rhaenys predicted, anticipating his imminent arrest.

"No rush. I'm curious to see if our king has the ruthlessness to handle Daemon," Corlys mused with interest.

"Hmph. They're all my kin; I have no interest in such drama," Renise retorted coldly, rising from the table.

Opting to return to Driftmark for the greater good, she had no desire to compete for the Iron Throne or witness further familial discord.

Internally, Rhaenys couldn't help but silently chastise her two cousins for their foolishness.

...

As midnight drew near and the early morning hours approached, the ball reached its peak, with the music reaching a crescendo that would stir the deepest emotions of the attendees.

"Scream!" A sudden cry pierced the air. "Fire! There's a fire outside!"

Gasps and murmurs rippled through the hall as flames flickered against the stained glass windows, casting an eerie glow inside.

Fire had erupted within the Red Keep, starting inconspicuously in an attic before rapidly spreading, engulfing nearby gambling dens and brothels.

Viserys and his tired entourage were trying to keep things calm as they tried to put out the fire.

Lyonel swiftly organized men to combat the fire, including his eldest son, Harwin.

"Your Grace, perhaps it's best if you depart," Lyonel urged, concerned for the king's well-being.

Viserys declined. "No, the fire hasn't reached the banquet hall yet. I must reassure our guests."

Suddenly, candles flickered and went out one by one, plunging the hall into darkness except for a few remaining bonfire pots.

"Protect the King!" Harrold, captain of the Kingsguard, sprang into action, quickly positioning himself between the king and any potential threats, followed closely by Cole.

Amidst the chaos, panicked cries rang out, echoing off the walls as noblewomen recoiled in fear.

Laena, in the dimness, grasped at Daemon's belt, her expression serious. "Where do you think you're going?"

Daemon tightened his grip on her chin as he replied coldly, "You said I should make a quick exit. Well, here's my chance."

"Do you really think you can escape?" Laena's words carried weight.

"I have to try. I'd rather lose my head or spend my days on the Wall, devoid of all pleasure," Daemon replied, slipping away into the confusion towards a secluded corner of the hall.

Watching him depart, Laena shook her head in disappointment. "A self-important man indeed."

...

As the fire raged on, Red Keep soldiers and gold-cloak guards from King's Landing worked hard to put it out.

Meanwhile, Daemon skillfully evaded the patrolling guards and made his way to a hidden passage within the Red Keep.

When he got there, he found a guy in black robes waiting for him. It was like they'd made a deal.

"Once this is done, our agreement will be fulfilled," the figure said, tossing Daemon a matching black robe.

Daemon's reply was brief. "I think it would be a good idea if you came with me."

The figure shook their head firmly. "No, I have another commitment I need to keep."

Without further ado, Daemon donned the black robe and disappeared into the secret passage, while the black-robed figure slipped away into the night.

As Daemon emerged from the Red Keep, he was met with a sudden downpour. The rain intensified as if spurred on by the earlier fire.

He kept going, undeterred by the weather, navigating the narrow alleys and letting the rain cascade around him.

Arriving at the Dragonpit

Ka-ching—

A Dragonkeeper's neck snapped suddenly from behind, his body collapsing lifelessly.

Another Dragonkeeper, startled, reached for his sword, but before he could react, a swift kick landed in his abdomen, sending him crashing to the ground.

With determination, Daemon advanced, swiftly crushing the fallen man's throat underfoot.

A swift and silent dispatched the two Dragonkeepers and cleared his path.

With Caraxes, his dragon, awaiting him, Daemon swiftly freed the beast from its chains and mounted its back.

As they soared into the stormy sky, a lone figure emerged from the shadows, their presence unnoticed.

...

Caraxes soared swiftly, leaving the skies over King's Landing behind and entering the expanse of Blackwater Bay.

It was raining hard, with each drop splashing loudly on the ground.

Daemon felt a rush of relief at escaping King's Landing. He knew he'd made the right call. Had he waited to depart early in the morning, he wouldn't have dared to face his brother.

"Roar..."

Caraxes suddenly roared, his body twisting uneasily.

"What's wrong, Caraxes?" Daemon inquired, sensing his dragon's agitation.

Caraxes's pupils dilated alertly as he quickened his flight.

Rumble!

A thunderstorm erupted, lightning illuminating the night sky.

Daemon looked up, spotting a massive shadow followed by Caraxes weaving among the clouds.

"Uncle, I've found you!" Rhaegar's voice boomed as the shadow descended.

"Roar..."

Another roar, distinct from Caraxes, widened Daemon's eyes in alarm.

Cannibal dove down, its green dragonfire igniting fiercely as it collided with Caraxes's neck.

"No!" Daemon yelled, gripping the reins tightly.

Before he could command a response, Cannibal's flames engulfed Caraxes's head and eyes.

Even in the rainy night, Cannibal's dragonfire raged fiercely.

"Cannibal, tear them apart!" Rhaegar's eyes glinted with madness as he watched the chaos unfold.

Daemon realized that his nephew was planning to kill him. He'd gone back to King's Landing to provoke him.

Yet, he'd been expecting Daemon to run and had been waiting for him.

"Roar..."

As Cannibal's flames died down, it grabbed Caraxes, its claws digging into his spine as it lunged for his wing with a savage bite.

Caraxes wailed in agony, twisting frantically in a futile attempt to break free from Cannibal's grasp.

However, despite its efforts, Caraxes couldn't escape, and its slender body was ensnared by Cannibal's relentless hold.

Stab...

Cannibal, having long hungered for the taste of its own kind, struck with ferocity, shattering Caraxes's shoulder blade with a single bite.

Poor Caraxes never stood a chance to retaliate; its body was torn asunder.

"Dracarys!"

Rhaegar's command echoed once more.

Cannibal savagely ripped apart flesh and blood, swallowing it greedily before unleashing another torrent of green dragonfire.

"Roar..."

Caraxes roared in agony as the dragonfire seared his already wounded flesh, causing him to plummet uncontrollably.

"Caraxes, hold on!"

Daemon's voice rang out desperately as he watched his dragon being destroyed before his eyes, a chill gripping his soul as he struggled to maintain his composure.

Rhaegar didn't show any mercy. Cannibal's flames kept raining down on Caraxes, trying to send him plummeting into the sea.

In the pouring rain and thunderous skies, Caraxes was no match for Cannibal's pursuit.

With a splash, it went into the ocean.

Daemon had no time to undo the chain around his waist; he was dragged into the depths alongside his dragon.

The sea was in a state of turmoil, with Caraxes's blood staining the waters crimson and mixing with the cold waves.

Rhaegar was shaking, holding Cannibal aloft, his once-regal attire now soaked by the rain.

As lightning illuminated the night, Rhaegar's expression twisted in agitation, his chest heaving.

Wiping away the rain, Rhaegar's features contorted into a cold glare.

"Uncle, you left me no choice!"

Rhaegar's voice echoed with a hint of madness. "I owed you a mouthful of dragonfire and today I paid it back!"

"My father may have spared you, but I won't! I've come to end you!"

The tempest intensified, mirroring Rhaegar's turbulent emotions.

Whew...

A gust of wind swept past, tossing Rhaegar's hair in disarray.

Cannibal roared, slowing its pace.

Rhaegar gazed up at the dark, cloudy sky, his expression conflicted, as if wrestling with a decision.

After a moment's hesitation, he gritted his teeth and issued a command, "Cannibal, let's go!"

"Roar..."

Cannibal obeyed eagerly, its wings beating with renewed vigor.

Looking back, the sea had vanished into a blur in the distance.

A bolt of lightning pierced the clouds, illuminating the other half of Rhaegar's face, revealing uncertainty and inner turmoil.

"You spared me on Dragonstone Island, so I'll grant you a chance to live," he murmured.

"With such a vast ocean, pray that Caraxes lives up to its name."

Chapter 118: Excellence in Swordsmanship

118 AC, Early Summer, Morning

Above the city of King's Landing, a pitch-black dragon soared gracefully, its enormous shadow casting a vast expanse of darkness over the city below.

"Roar..."

The dragon's roar reverberated across the sky, causing many people to stop and look up in awe. When they saw the dragon, they showed respect and quickly left.

After seven years, the people of King's Landing had gotten used to seeing the black dragon. It belonged to Rhaegar Targaryen, the king's eldest son and heir to the Iron Throne, who was known affectionately as the Good Prince.

Singers and troubadours had given him this title because they thought he was kind and did a lot of good, especially for the city's orphanage.

The black dragon flew around King's Landing before landing slowly on the hill where the Dragonpit was located.

"Welcome back, Prince."

The Dragonkeepers, who had been awaiting his return, rushed forward as the massive dragon touched down.

Sitting atop Cannibal, a fierce dragon, was a handsome young man with silver hair, purple eyes, and a pale complexion. His expression remained indifferent as he dismounted.

"Where's Erryk? Tell him to get the guards ready for the Mushroom Set's caravan," Rhaegar said firmly.

Maynard Waters, garbed in a scholar's robe, approached respectfully. "Prince, the Kingsguard have been summoned back to the Red Keep."

Rhaegar nodded, a smile touching his lips. "Then send someone to make the necessary preparations. The caravan will arrive before afternoon."

"Yes, Prince," Maynard responded promptly.

Once he'd given his orders, Rhaegar climbed down the ladder and patted Cannibal's snout gently.

"Hoo..."

Cannibal snorted, his green pupils full of reluctance.

Rhaegar said, "Just stay in the Dragonpit and you can roam freely at night."

"Roar..."

Cannibal shook his head, then lumbered towards the Dragonpit. The Dragonkeepers quickly stepped aside, wary of the swaying dragon's tail.

Seeing this, Rhaegar smiled faintly. "Let's go. After a few days away, it's time to return to the Red Keep."

"Yes, Prince," responded the Dragonkeepers in unison, forming two lines to escort the prince to his carriage, flanking it as it moved.

After years of diligent work, the Dragonpit had been thoroughly refurbished and now lay firmly under Rhaegar's control. In King's Landing, the Dragonpit was undeniably his domain.

...

The Red Keep, Martial Arts Arena

Rhaegar had changed out of his dragon-riding attire. He now stood bare-chested, wearing a skirt-like garment around his waist and holding an elegant sword.

The attire was inspired by fragmented images from his dreams. These dreams were often disjointed, but occasionally offered practical insights that Rhaegar experimented with during his leisure time.

The sword in his hand was the Dark Sister, one of the Targaryen family's ancestral blades. This Valyrian steel longsword had been a gift from his dear uncle Daemon on the night of the heir exchange.

Rhaegar often missed his uncle, who always brought him something remarkable whenever they met.

Clang...

The sound of iron striking iron echoed as Rhaegar wielded the Dark Sister, clashing with his opponent.

"Prince, your swordplay is swift, but it lacks finesse," observed Syrio, the Water Dancer.

Syrio was a short man with curly brown hair. He smiled calmly and moved with a light step. His sword, held like a snake in his hand, was poised to strike.

Syrio had been teaching Rhaegar how to use a sword since he was eight years old, and they often sparred. Today, Rhaegar wanted to test how much he had progressed.

He lunged forward, the Dark Sister flashing darkly as it slashed towards Syrio.

Syrio responded with ease, blocking and retreating, maintaining his stance with one hand holding the sword and the other behind his back.

"Syrio, a one-handed sword can't block a heavy chop!" Rhaegar's voice was clear and confident. He kicked Syrio in the stomach, then brought his sword down in a two-handed strike.

At only thirteen years old, Rhaegar already stood tall at 175 centimeters. His upright posture and long limbs allowed him to momentarily overpower Syrio during their sparring sessions.

Syrio quickly regained his footing and swung his sword upwards, countering Rhaegar's attack with practiced precision.

Clang...

With a sharp crack, Syrio's one-handed sword broke, and the Dark Sister hovered above his head.

"You win, Prince," Syrio said, swallowing hard as he looked up at the cold steel.

"Your swordsmanship is the best in the continent. I only had the advantage because my weapon is superior," Rhaegar said, sheathing the Dark Sister. He nodded towards Erryk, who was watching from a distance, and then beckoned him over.

"Prince, catch!"

Erryk threw a steel lance, which Rhaegar caught with ease.

"Let's do this again, Syrio," Rhaegar said, taking the lance in both hands. He moved with great agility, spinning the lance with fluid grace.

Rhaegar was not only a great swordsman; he was also a skilled lancer. He'd spent years honing his sword skills, while his lance skills were developed through exploring ancient relics.

By calling the system, he can see the new information.

Rhaegar Targaryen

Talent: Dreamer (Gold), Longevity (Green)

Bloodline: Ancient Valyrian Dragonlord (39%)

Skills: Sword Mastery, Spear Mastery, Old Valyrian Language Proficiency

Relic: Blood and Fire, True Dragon's Blood, Knight's Oath

Evaluation: "Excellent scion of an ancient bloodline, expect that gold coin of yours to always be on the greatness side."

Rhaegar's mouth curled into a smile as he reviewed the system panel.

His spearmanship came from a exploration from a ancient broken lance, granting him exceptional skill at a young age.

Facing the prince's lance, Syrio smiled helplessly and retrieved another one-handed sword from the weapon rack.

This time, their combat was even fiercer.

Rhaegar's spear moved like a raging storm, constantly striking and thrusting.

Syrio's movements were fluid, his one-handed sword blocking and intercepting while his body danced left and right with agility.

As the fierce exchange continued, Rhaegar's breathing grew heavier, his face flushed with excitement.

He relished the sensation of his blood boiling—it was more invigorating than a hot spring.

With a final, powerful strike, the spearhead spun and thrust straight towards Syrio's forehead.

Dang...

The tip of the spear swept past Syrio's eyes, aiming for his brow, but was blocked by the spine of his sword.

Syrio's eyes were intense as he held his sword firmly to stop the spear.

Slap...

"Good move, Rhaegar!"

A clear voice accompanied by applause echoed from the second-floor observation deck.

Rhaegar looked over to see Rhaenyra, dressed in a black dress, smiling and clapping enthusiastically.

"Rhaenyra, you're back from Dragonstone Island?"

Rhaegar took his spear and looked at her with surprise.

Rhaenyra was beaming as she turned and walked to the staircase entrance, then ran down the stairs.

"I got back yesterday, and you were the only one who didn't know."

Rhaegar was overjoyed to see his sister after such a long time and quickly walked towards the staircase corner.

As Syrio passed by, Rhaegar swung his spear, hitting Syrio in the leg and sending him sprawling.

Before Syrio could even moan in pain, Erryk stepped forward, shackles in hand, and quickly cuffed Syrio's hands and feet.

"Time to wrap it up, Swordsman," Erryk said. He grabbed Syrio by the arm and caught the lance Rhaegar threw to him with the other hand.

Syrio was more than just Rhaegar's fencing teacher. He was also a regular visitor to the dungeons of the Red Keep.

Chapter 119: Small Council Meeting

Rhaegar didn't even look back; he'd gotten used to it. Syrio made a mistake and decided to face the consequences instead of running away. Rhaegar respected his swordsman teacher's decision.

Rhaenyra quickly reached the corner of the stairs, jogging down to meet him. The two siblings embraced tightly.

At 21, Rhaenyra had blossomed into a beautiful woman, her slim figure accentuated by a black skirt, her long silver hair framing her face.

Rhaegar, now more imposing and confident, grabbed her by the waist, looked her over, and asked, "Did the trip go well?"

Rhaenyra, slightly shorter than her brother, leaned into his arms and lifted her chin proudly. "Syrax laid three dragon eggs, three whole eggs!" She held up three fingers, beaming with pride.

"Syrax lives up to her name. The future of our family depends on such a productive dragon," Rhaegar praised her with a smile.

Suddenly, Rhaenyra's smile faded a bit. "Are your dreams still troubling you?" she asked, her gaze full of concern. She gently stroked his pale complexion, noting the dark circles under his eyes.

"It's okay, just one dream every few days. I've gotten used to it," Rhaegar reassured her, shaking his head.

Over the years, his Dreamer talent had been kicking in, bringing vivid images of dragon fights, flames, and battles into his dreams.

There were even glimpses of another world, mostly useless except for some historical facts about dynastic changes.

Rhaenyra, full of pity, wrapped her arms around his neck and whispered in his ear, "I haven't seen you for a month. Did you miss me?"

"Of course, all the time," Rhaegar replied, a smile breaking across his pale cheeks.

"That's a good boy. Here's a reward for you." Rhaenyra cupped his cheek and placed a light kiss on it.

Rhaegar coughed softly, breaking away from the embrace and changing the subject. "I need to take a shower first. Let the kitchen prepare a reception for you."

"No problem," Rhaenyra agreed with a smile.

...

Rhaenyra's bedroom smelled great. It was filled with the aroma of a sumptuous meal. The round table was loaded with fried and sautéed dishes, along with a variety of desserts.

Rhaenyra, not worried about her image, took a big bite of the food and enjoyed every bite.

Rhaegar, having eaten a few simple bites, sat back to watch.

The dishes were based on common ingredients but were delicious and easy to prepare.

He had arranged for a small kitchen and trusted staff to prepare his meals.

Ostensibly, this was to develop new recipes, but in reality, it was a precaution against poisoning—two birds with one stone.

Knock Knock

Halfway through the meal, there was a knock on the door and Erryk's voice came through. "Prince, the king has convened a Small Council meeting and invited you to attend."

Rhaegar's eyes flashed slightly. "Got it, I'll be there in a moment."

"Father is calling you; you'd better go quickly," Rhaenyra suggested, swallowing a mouthful of cake, her cheeks puffing out.

"There's no rush. We'll go together once you're done eating," Rhaegar said nonchalantly, leaning back in his chair.

"What am I going to do? I'm not a adviser," Rhaenyra said hesitantly.

As the Princess of Dragonstone, she was technically qualified to attend the Small Council Meeting, but her status as the former crown princess made it somewhat awkward.

"It doesn't matter. There's a good show to be seen today," Rhaegar said, a smile spreading across his face as he thought of the issues discussed at the last Small Council Meeting.

...

Half an Hour Later

Rhaegar escorted Rhaenyra to the council hall. As they approached the solemn gates, Rhaegar glanced at her nostalgically. "Rhaenyra, do you remember the first time I came here?"

"You were just a little kid then, clinging to me and calling me sister," Rhaenyra replied, resting her hands in front of her belly and smiling at the memory.

"That's right. Last time, you led me through the door. This time, it's my turn," Rhaegar said, placing his hand on the gate and giving it a firm push.

Creak...

The door opened wide, revealing the scene inside. Viserys sat at the head of a round table, flanked by the other advisers of the realm.

Rhaegar stepped through the door, looking around before opening his arms. "My lords, forgive me for being late."

Viserys rose slowly, his eyes on his eldest son. "Rhaegar, it is not a good habit to be late," he said with mock sternness.

"Of course, but I have an excuse," Rhaegar replied, stepping aside to reveal Rhaenyra behind him.

"Rhaenyra, will you be attending the Small Council meeting as well?" Viserys asked, a smile spreading across his face at the sight of his daughter.

Viserys knew that Rhaenyra had returned to King's Landing from Dragonstone yesterday, but she had not come to see him.

He was not angry about this. Rhaenyra had deliberately distanced herself from him since the heir exchange, but he believed it was worth it.

Rhaegar had grown into a better heir, bringing him hope and making him feel much better in recent years.

"Oh, I didn't plan on it," Rhaenyra shrugged, walking calmly inside. She'd grown up in this place and it felt like home to her.

"Father, what's the big topic today?" Rhaegar asked, more relaxed than Rhaenyra, as he strode in and swept his gaze over the small council.

Present were: Lyonel Strong: Hand of the King, Tyland Lannister: Master of Ships, Maester Mellos: Grand Maester, Lyman Beesbury: Master of Coin, Jasper Wylde: Master of Laws.

Beside Viserys stood Ser Criston Cole, the new Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, appointed in 112 AC after the death of Ser Harrold Westerling.

The advisers all stood up to show their respect as Rhaegar approached the conference table. "Sit down, no need to be polite," he nodded gently.

Rhaegar noticed only one empty chair at the table and turned to Ser Criston Cole. "Ser, please fetch a chair."

Cole glanced at the king, hesitating. The Master of Laws, Jasper Wylde, frowned and spoke up, "Prince, the Princess is not a member of the small council and should be excused."

"I am not a member of the small council either, should I recuse myself as well?" Rhaegar replied, pulling back the chair in front of him and tilting his head towards Jasper.

Jasper blanched and said, "You are the heir, and it is in accordance with etiquette for you to participate in political affairs."

"Very well. Rhaenyra was also once heir and is the Princess of Dragonstone. She is eligible to participate in the council," Rhaegar said firmly. He was the heir, and what he said was the rule.

He then pulled Rhaenyra's hand and pressed her into the empty chair. Looking back at Cole, he said coldly, "Ser, do I have to say it a second time?"

Cole remained silent and looked to the King. Viserys, somewhat helpless, said, "Go on, move a chair for the princess."

Rhaenyra was the Princess of Dragonstone, holding one of the most important lands of the Targaryen family. Her participation in the council indicated a desire to mend her relationship with her father, which was beneficial for both the family and the realm.

When the chair was brought in, Rhaenyra sat down beside Rhaegar and reached for the platter in the center of the table. Inside the plate was a black stone ball with a green dragon pattern.

Chapter 120: Dragonpit Reform

Tink—

The stone ball landed in the slot in front of Rhaegar, signifying that the heir prince was ready and the Small Council Meeting had officially begun.

Tyland Lannister was the first to speak, his expression serious. "Your Grace, there are signs that the Kingdom of the Three Daughters is resurging after many years."

"According to the latest reports, ships near the Stepstones have been intercepted by an unknown group of pirates."

Viserys's face grew heavy. "Are you sure it's the Three Daughters?"

"Not confirmed yet, but the signs point to them," Tyland replied, shaking his head.

"The Three Daughters' pirates are a serious threat to the kingdom. We must send more spies to gather accurate information and should not underestimate them," Viserys sighed.

He didn't want the kingdom involved in a war, especially with the Stepstones so far from King's Landing.

Tyland nodded, concluding his report.

Next was Lyonel Strong, Hand of the King. Placing one hand on the table, the bloated Hand spoke slowly, "Your Grace, the construction of the Prince's palace has begun, and the cost is considerable."

"That's fine. We'll cover it from the treasury," Viserys said, smiling at Rhaegar. "That's good news for you."

"Thank you, Father," Rhaegar replied, leaning back in his chair with a smile.

Traditionally, the fiefdoms of Crown Princes were on Dragonstone.

To compensate Rhaenyra, the island was returned to her until her death, leaving Rhaegar without his own fiefdom.

Viserys had given Rhaegar a piece of land of his choosing to build the Prince's Palace. Work had begun early this year, but due to its distance from King's Landing and the time required to select materials and labor, construction had only recently started.

Lyonel finished his report.

The Minister of Finance, Lyman Beesbury, rose slowly to his feet, holding a report in his hand.

"Your Grace, the Prince has submitted a proposal for the reconstruction of the Dragonpit. The costs are so high that I cannot authorize it."

"Oh, let me see," Viserys said, puzzled. Criston Cole passed the report to him.

Viserys flipped through a few pages, his face darkening with each page he read.

He gritted his teeth and said, "Rhaegar, the Dragonpit is a significant structure for the royal family. It cost a fortune to build, and now you want to demolish and rebuild it?"

Rhaegar remained calm and replied, "Father, you yourself said the Dragonpit is extremely important."

"The current Dragonpit is merely a place of confinement, not a suitable nest for dragons."

"Dismantling and rebuilding a more appropriate nest will benefit our dragon breeding efforts."

Rhaenyra raised her hand in support. "I agree!"

"I disagree!" Viserys interjected sharply. Grimacing, he continued, "Look at your proposal. To build a tower-like Dragonpit, we'd need all the stone in the kingdom and immense resources."

He knew the Dragonpit was important, but he believed that power was the key to ruling the kingdom. Rebuilding would be so expensive that even emptying the treasury might not be enough.

Lyman Beesbury spoke up, "Your Grace, the construction of the Prince's Palace has already strained our finances. Rebuilding the Dragonpit could bankrupt us."

As the master of coin and lord treasurer, every gold coin in the treasury was his lifeblood. The idea of spending such a large sum distressed him deeply.

Tyland raised his hand to speak. "We need to make sure the treasury is full, especially with the uncertain situation on the Stepstones.

"That's right, I veto the prince's proposal," Jasper added.

As the small council voiced their opposition, Viserys took a deep breath and said, "This proposal is dismissed. The country can't afford such extravagance."

"The kingdom is always short of money," Rhaegar muttered, undeterred. "The reconstruction can wait, but the reform program must pass."

The reform program included increasing the number of Dragonkeepers, dragon combat training, and reorganizing a research group.

Rhaenyra turned to Rhaegar in surprise. Despite her time as heir, she hadn't been allowed to present programs to the Pre-Regency Council so freely.

She suddenly realized the gap between them. Rhaegar was no longer a child but a grown man. His silver-gold hair, dark circles under his eyes, high nose, and firm lips gave him a dignified appearance. His posture was straight, his demeanor calm, and his manners impeccable.

Many noble ladies in the kingdom had been enchanted by him at first sight. Suddenly, Rhaenyra's earlobes turned slightly red, and she hurriedly looked away.

"Rhaegar is an adult now," she murmured to herself, her heart beating a little faster.

No one noticed the princess's thoughts as the discussion over the Dragonpit reform continued heatedly.

Half an hour later, the discussion concluded. Viserys clapped his hands and said, "The Dragonpit can be reformed, but it must be done within its limits. If anything goes wrong, it should be halted immediately."

"Yes, Father."

The motion passed, and Rhaegar, grateful, embraced his father. He had never expected the proposal to rebuild the Dragonpit to pass. Reform had been his primary goal. The current Dragonpit was still too weak and needed strengthening in every aspect.

Viserys, somewhat resigned, squeezed his eldest son's arm. It gave him some comfort. The mere sight of a healthy, intelligent heir was reassuring.

Viserys thought for a moment and then advised, "You can take charge of the Dragonpit, but after this, you will assist the advisers and learn how to run the kingdom."

Rhaegar understood his father's good intentions and accepted gladly. "No problem, Father."

With the Dragonpit matter settled, the Small Council moved on to other political issues.

Rhaenyra, not particularly interested in politics, rose silently from her chair. She walked around the council table, picked up a flask from the fireplace, and poured a glass of wine for her father. She then served each of the ministers. The ministers nodded their thanks, and for a moment, it felt like old times.

Rhaenyra, as a young girl, had often served wine while listening to the council's discussions. When she finally reached Rhaegar, nostalgia filled her. She lifted the wine bottle skillfully.

Rhaegar, however, covered his glass and moved aside. Looking at her gently, he said, "You're not serving wine anymore."

After her teenage years, Rhaenyra had grown more beautiful, deserving the title "Realm's Delight."

Rhaenyra smiled. "I have to do something."

"Sit down. The meeting will be over soon."

Rhaegar pulled her back into her seat and pushed the flask toward their father, who had finished his drink.