

G.O Thrones 18

Chapter 18: Vagabond Swordsman

Erryk was taken aback by the sudden and deft attack. When he looked up, he saw the assailant seated calmly, holding a silver chopstick.

"Ser Kingsguard, I mean no harm. I am merely a hungry wanderer in search of sustenance," the man explained with a pleasant demeanor.

Observing this exchange, Rhaegar discreetly set down his plate and positioned himself behind Erryk. The swiftness of the attack indicated the stranger's proficiency, and Rhaegar deemed it prudent to tread cautiously.

"You are most generous, Your Highness," the man remarked, his eyes lighting up at the sight of the pastries. He graciously bowed to Rhaegar, signaling his genuine intent.

As Rhaegar examined the man, he noted his curly brown hair, brown eyes, and weathered yet amiable countenance. Despite his affable appearance, the man stood notably short, a characteristic that set him apart from the towering knights of the realm.

Sensing Rhaegar's curiosity, the man smiled and inquired, "I know who you are, but do you know who I am?"

Rhaegar, intrigued, questioned, "And who might you be?"

"A nobody," the man responded nonchalantly, prompting a bemused reaction from Rhaegar.

Frustration simmered within Rhaegar as he clenched his fist, feeling as though he was being toyed with.

Before Rhaegar could voice his vexation, the man extended the plate to him and whispered, "I am Syrio Friar, a wandering swordsman from Braavos. Allow me, brother, to share this meal with you."

As Rhaegar gazed into Syrio's eyes, he found them inscrutable, like still water hiding the depths below. Turning to Erryk, Rhaegar silently sought his counsel, receiving a subtle nod in response—a signal that he had the authority to handle the situation as he saw fit.

Within the confines of the Red Keep, the brazen assassination of the King's eldest son was an unthinkable act, and Rhaegar knew he held a position of relative safety.

Picking up a piece of pastry, Rhaegar extended it towards Syrio with a warm smile. "Allow me to share this with you, Syrio Friar."

Ever genial, Syrio reciprocated the gesture. "You can call me Syrio, though I'm not of noble birth and currently find myself without employment."

Intrigued, Rhaegar inquired about Syrio's past exploits with the sword, impressed by his skill and intrigued by his origins in an overseas city-state.

"We can converse as we dine," Syrio suggested, to which Rhaegar readily agreed.

Returning to their seats, the tension of their earlier encounter dissipated as they engaged in casual conversation over the pastries.

During their exchange, Rhaegar gleaned insights into Syrio's background. Syrio had served as a knight's squire in his youth, honing his swordsmanship from an early age. However, his true passion lay in the art of dance—a dream he pursued fervently.

As fate would have it, Syrio found himself employed as a royal dancer by a prominent merchant in Braavos. Yet, his newfound fortune was short-lived, as his employer met a grisly end, implicating Syrio in the crime. To evade capture, he sought refuge in Westeros, where he found himself in the good graces of a noblewoman who invited him to partake in the festivities at the Red Keep.

Rhaegar listened intently, captivated by Syrio's tale as if transported into the narrative himself.

From time to time, one must endure injustice, he thought to himself as he ate and drank, lamenting the unfairness of fate.

At that moment, it seemed as though their hearts were confiding in each other.

Of course, the above is purely Erryk's personal perspective.

In reality, Rhaegar listened seriously to Syrio's speech, his heart filled with contempt. "A Braavosi dancer with the talent to master swordsmanship, truly rare," he remarked sarcastically, observing Syrio's appearance. "If you want height, you have fencing skills; if you want looks, you have fencing skills... How blind must the rich man of Braavos be to hire such a runt to dance for him? A unique taste, indeed," he scoffed. "A likely story. It's improbable that some noblewoman would coax him to the Red Keep just to rub shoulders and enjoy the food and drink."

Rhaegar laughed at his remarks but remained silent, quietly observing Syrio fabricate his tale.

After chatting for a while, all the chocolate pastries on the nearby table had been eaten, and Syrio stopped regretfully. Casually, he mentioned the tournament happening outside.

"Prince, there's a great duel going on out there. Don't you want to go see it?"

Rhaegar shook his head. "No, I'm too young to witness bloodshed."

Syrio chuckled. "That's true, but the dueling arena is chaotic. The king is furious."

"Why?" Rhaegar frowned, sensing a hidden agenda in Syrio's words.

"A Dornishman killed his rival, and he is making a spectacle of it," Syrio explained, taking a small sip of his wine. "The Dornishman will continue to challenge; the second duel should have just begun."

"Let's go see," Rhaegar said, rising immediately and leading Erryk to the tournament grounds at a brisk pace.

Syrio smiled and followed suit.

As the three of them arrived at the arena, they noticed that the audience was loudly cheering for one particular individual.

Rhaegar found a spot nearby and stood behind the railing to watch.

Inside the arena, a silver-gray armored knight held a sword in both hands, wielding it forcefully and driving a brown-skinned young man back.

With each swipe of his sword, the crowd cheered and encouraged him to finish off his opponent.

After observing for a while, Erryk whispered, "The advantage lies with the Knight of the Stormlands, while his opponent, the Dornishman, is just a shameless scoundrel."

Rhaegar nodded, fully engrossed in the duel.

The Knight launched relentless attacks in a typical charging style, swift and precise, effectively suppressing his opponent's movements and leaving little room for counterattacks.

The Dornish, however, utilized the agility provided by his light armor to evade each strike, darting left and right. His lance served as both a shield and a weapon against the knight's sword, resulting in a cacophony of clashing sounds echoing throughout the arena.

While they watched the duel unfold, Syrio suddenly remarked, "The outcome is already decided; the shift from offense to defense is imminent."

Rhaegar looked at him skeptically and inquired, "Why do you say that? That Knight seems quite formidable, doesn't he?"

"It's true that he's formidable on the battlefield, but the Dornish is avoiding direct confrontation and only needs to wait for his opponent to tire out before claiming victory," Syrio explained.

Rhaegar glanced towards the dueling arena.

Upon closer inspection, he noticed that the knight was indeed slightly panting after his attacks, struggling to close the distance with his opponent using his longsword.

Meanwhile, the Dornish youth appeared to have some energy left and was skillfully evading the confrontation.

He didn't forget to taunt, "Lord Knight, if you were on horseback, I might reconsider facing you, but alas, you're stuck in the ground."

"Even without a horse, severing your head won't be a problem," Ser Balot retorted, his voice dripping with disdain, though sweat glistened on his brow.

Rhaegar tugged at Erryk's cloak, "Ser, is it true that Ser Balot is losing?"

Erryk's expression was grave, "It's difficult to say. The cunning Dornishman isn't giving him any opportunity to gain ground."

"And is heavily armored; the longer this goes on, the worse it'll be for him."

At the opportune moment, Syrio interjected, "Armor can save a warrior's life in crucial moments, but it also hampers the body's flexibility."

"Like the Dothraki across the sea, who never wear armor, believing that agility is the key to victory in battle."

"Let's keep watching. I have faith in Ser Balot."

Rhaegar's expression hardened, secretly rooting for the knight.

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(Syrio is an original character created by the author, inspired by the dance teacher Syrio in the series.)

