

## G.O Thrones 301

### Chapter 301: Hightower Greed

It wasn't long before Rhaegar emerged from the unassuming tent. His short silver-gold hair partially obscured his eyes, but the intense light in them was unmistakable.

Orwyle, the gray-robed maester, said nothing as he handed Rhaegar a thick book—a brief history of the modern court. Each time a king ascended to the Iron Throne, a maester sent by the Citadel would meticulously record the actions of the king and his blood relatives. These records were eventually compiled into the history of House Targaryen.

The brief history recorded by Grand Maester Mellos was riddled with anomalies. Rhaegar glanced up at the afternoon sun, high in the blue sky amidst drifting white clouds, his heart heavy with the disturbing records.

Determined, he headed straight for the main tent.

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Meanwhile, at the camp's picnic area, Aegon wandered aimlessly, his eyelids drooping. Occasionally, he would grab a bottle of red wine from the open-air tables, bite off the cork, and drink deeply. Scattered around were nobles of various ranks, busy with hunting and barbecuing, casting curious glances at the king's second son.

Following Aegon closely were the four daughters of House Baratheon, their foreheads sweaty and boots muddy.

"How much longer will you keep this up, Your Highness Aegon?" Cassandra Baratheon, the eldest, clenched her teeth and finally voiced her frustration. They were here to discuss marriage prospects, not to act as guards on patrol. After trailing Aegon for half the day, they were parched and tired, while he continued to drink aimlessly.

Aegon glanced at her, noticing their exhausted state. "What's the matter? Thirsty or tired?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Maris Baratheon, the second eldest, stepped forward, her not-so-pretty face twisted in a frown. "Both tired and thirsty. You should be entertaining us properly instead of dragging us around the camp," she said, trying to suppress her anger.

The two youngest Baratheon daughters, Ellyn and Floris, nodded in agreement, glaring at Aegon.

Back at Storm's End, the four sisters were collectively known as the Four Storms and were much favored by their father, Borros Baratheon. They weren't used to being slighted like this.

"If you're tired, find a place to rest, and if you're thirsty, there's plenty of good wine on the table," Aegon said dismissively. "And stop following me. You're delaying my search for a place to sleep."

Maris, furious, stomped her foot in frustration. Aegon sneered at her, "What now? Just go sit somewhere."

His eyes swept over Maris, and his disdain grew. Her face wasn't attractive, and her petite body and short legs didn't appeal to him at all. If it weren't for Borros Baratheon's defiance, he wouldn't have lost so much face. Marrying one of Borros's daughters was out of the question.

Sensing Aegon's contempt, Maris's eyes reddened with anger. She wanted to call her guards to teach him a lesson, but the prince's status and their father's precarious situation stopped her.

Cassandra, the eldest, took a deep breath and fetched a bottle of wine and some glasses from a nearby table, sharing them with her sisters. She then looked at Aegon, who seemed ready to continue his aimless wandering. "Keep wandering around until it gets dark. We'll probably be circling you until the end of the Kingswood hunt. That way, you'll have something to brag about later," she said sharply.

She had realized that Aegon had no interest in them and was merely toying with them. If tormenting him was the only option, then so be it.

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While the heirs of the two families engaged in their tense "friendly" interactions, two pairs of keen eyes watched from a distance.

At an outdoor dining table, two round wooden piers served as benches. Otto stood on one side of the table, picking up a bottle of wine and pouring it, first offering the glass to his brother, Hobert Hightower, who stood beside him. The brothers raised their glasses, sharing a drink while keeping their eyes fixed on Aegon and the Four Storms.

"Brother, it seems my good grandson doesn't fancy the Baratheon daughters," Hobert remarked, swirling his goblet with a smug expression.

Otto's face remained indifferent. "Marriage is a matter between families; the preferences of the individuals involved are secondary."

Hobert chuckled, "Our King is known for his benevolence."

Otto sliced a piece of steak from his porcelain plate, his eyes calm. "The royal family has always favored alliances with House Arryn of the Vale and House Baratheon of Storm's End. These marriages help maintain peace in the kingdom."

The noble houses of Westeros were powerful and widely distributed, often becoming thorns in the side of the royal family. The Starks of the North, the Lannisters of the West, and the Martells of Dorne were particularly troublesome.

"The Starks are isolated in the North and could move south at any time. The Lannisters control the gold mines and Lannisport, their wealth unmatched. The Martells frequently raid our borders and remain at odds with the Iron Throne," Otto continued. "In this context, strategic alliances are essential."

"The Arryns of the Vale can block the Starks from moving south, and with the support of the Tullys of the Riverlands, they can keep the battlefield away from King's Landing. The Baratheons at Storm's End are close to King's Landing, crucial for its defense and the protection of the Boneway and the Dornish Marches."

Hobert laughed, "Let's see which of the Four Storms my nephew and grandson will choose."

Otto forked another piece of steak, chewing thoughtfully. "You have something to say, Hobert."

Hobert sipped his wine, then glanced towards a corner, not bothering to hide his thoughts. "The king's health is failing. Our family should establish a new alliance with the royal family."

"A marriage alliance?" Otto frowned, following his brother's gaze.

Under a modest awning, three silver-haired siblings sat together: Helaena in the center, with Aemond and Daeron on either side. They were enjoying fruits and desserts, occasionally glancing at Aegon and the Baratheon girls.

Daeron, with a piece of cake in his mouth, mumbled, "Aegon likes girls, so why is he avoiding them?"

"Maybe the older girls aren't pretty enough," Aemond replied casually.

Suddenly, Aegon slapped Cassandra Baratheon, knocking her to the ground. Aemond's eyes widened in shock. "Oh shit, Aegon hit someone."

Helaena and Daeron quickly got up and rushed towards the commotion.

Otto and Hobert froze, watching the scene unfold. Hobert grinned, "It seems our nephews and grandsons are still the best candidates for marriage."

Otto's expression darkened. He left without a word, realizing the situation was veering off course and needing immediate intervention to salvage their plans.

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Inside the women's tent, the warm glow of lanterns illuminated the space. Several coffee tables were artfully separated by screens, each surrounded by ornate chairs.

In the center, noble ladies and young women from various houses gathered around a prominent coffee table. Alicent sat next to Lady Elenda on one side, opposite Rhaenyra and Laena, who were accompanied by a pair of twin girls. Near a corner, Larys Strong sat alone on a round bench, indulging his hobby of eavesdropping on the women's gossip and news. His presence was tolerated due to his lameness.

Despite the tent being designated for women, several male family members, including the second son of the Hand of the King, mingled among them. The chatter around the tables was incessant. Alicent and Rhaenyra, holding their respective statuses, listened more than they spoke, occasionally interjecting.

As the conversation progressed, the topics grew more pointed. An elderly woman, her black hair streaked with white, took a sip of tea before speaking sharply, "The Targaryen Princes are restless, eager for war, it seems."

Alicent, Rhaenyra, and Laena froze, surprised by the bluntness of the statement. Each of them had close ties to the Targaryen princes and were taken aback by the old woman's attitude.

"Lady Swann, what do you mean by that?" Alicent, the oldest and highest-ranking among them, inquired with a courteous smile.

"Just speaking the truth." Lady Swann's gaze flicked over Rhaenyra and Laena. "Prince Daemon has been plundering the ships of the Triarchy since he became the Commander of the Narrow Sea."

Laena's face tightened, and she opened her mouth to retort, but Lady Swann continued, turning her attention to Rhaenyra. "And Prince Rhaegar recently rode his dragon to invade Volantis, executed two Triarchs, and nearly sparked a war between Westeros and the Free Cities."

Rhaenyra, defensive of her brother, responded coldly, "Lady Swann, you can't speak such accusations lightly."

"Did I say anything untrue?" Lady Swann retorted, her tone haughty. "What Prince Daemon and Prince Rhaegar did is well known."

Rhaenyra's eyes narrowed as she noticed the gold jewelry on Lady Swann's lapel, engraved with the family crest of two swans facing each other. The Swann family, based in Stonehelm in the Stormlands, had long overseen the sea routes along the Dornish coast.

Along with Lady Elenda's maternal family, the Carons of Nightsong, they were among the oldest and strongest families in the Stormlands.

Understanding dawned on Rhaenyra. The Swann House, reliant on seafaring for their wealth, was undoubtedly suffering due to the royal family's actions against House Baratheon and the disruptions along the Narrow Sea caused by Daemon and Rhaegar. Lady Swann was here to voice her grievances.

Alicent and Laena quickly grasped the underlying motive as well. As Rhaenyra's stepmother, Alicent tried to mediate with a diplomatic smile. However, Laena, unable to hold back, spoke up first. "Lady Swann, the Triarchy has always been hostile to the kingdom. Daemon fulfilling his duties is no excuse for you to spread such falsehoods."

#### Chapter 302: Viserys' Will to Tame a Dragon

Laena's demeanor shifted from her usual gentle nature to a strong defense of Daemon. Raised by an ambitious father and an independent mother, Laena had developed an intelligent and sensitive heart. Despite Daemon's prodigal ways, infidelities, and flirtations, Laena remained loyal and supportive of her husband.

Lady Swann, however, had a different perspective and argued, "Daemon's duties do not include plundering ships. He does it for his own selfish desires."

Laena's face darkened, her mind in turmoil. She had long suspected Daemon of hiding things and becoming increasingly violent, but she wasn't aware of all his actions. Considering Lady Swann's accusations, it was plausible that Daemon had indeed engaged in piracy. This was a grave accusation.

"Stay calm," Rhaenyra, sitting beside Laena, placed a reassuring hand on hers and whispered soothingly.

Lady Swann shifted her gaze to Rhaenyra and continued her tirade, "Daemon is a menace, and Prince Rhaegar is no better. He attacked the Triarchy and now seeks to conquer Volantis."

"Lady Swann, do you have proof that Rhaegar invaded Volantis?" Rhaenyra asked, her voice steady, as she lifted her wine glass from the coffee table.

"Prince Rhaegar publicly burned the consul of Volantis with his dragon. The city still talks of it," Lady Swann said flatly.

"Is that proof?" Rhaenyra pressed.

Lady Swann frowned, "It's common knowledge."

"Common knowledge isn't evidence," Rhaenyra countered. "Who can verify that Rhaegar invaded Volantis? Where is the physical evidence of his invasion?"

"And why hasn't the current consul of Volantis declared war or retaliated against Rhaegar?" she added, her voice growing sharper.

Lady Swann's face hardened as she stammered, "Volantis fears retaliation. The truth is, Prince Rhaegar invaded privately."

"Nonsense!" Rhaenyra stood abruptly, raising her wine cup. She splashed its contents onto Lady Swann's face.

As the old woman wiped her face in shock, Rhaenyra's eyes were ice-cold. "Accusations without evidence are slanderous. You insult the Heir to the Throne without proof, a crime punishable by death for treason!"

The room erupted in chaos. Sensing the escalation, Alicent quickly stood and intervened, "Calm down, everyone. This is just an argument, not a cause for real conflict."

Rhaenyra glared at her. "Alicent, Rhaegar is my brother. If you won't defend him, I will. Don't interfere."

Alicent's attempt to deescalate the situation seemed only to fuel the tension. Lady Swann, feeling emboldened, retorted, "Is this the princess you raised, Queen?"

At these words, Rhaenyra's temper flared. Despite their past friendship, Rhaenyra and Alicent were now estranged. The insinuation that Alicent had any hand in her upbringing was infuriating.

Rhaenyra stepped forward and slapped Lady Swann across the face with a resounding crack. The old woman staggered, her eyes wide with disbelief as she clutched her stinging cheek.

Rhaenyra's eyes were cold and fiery as she glared at Lady Swann. "Lady Swann, you have shown me today what it means to have a big head and a small mind," she said, her voice cutting through the tension.

"The war between the Kingdom and the Triarchy has never ceased, but it was Rhaegar who invaded the city-state and secured peace for the Kingdom for years," Rhaenyra declared, pointing to Laena, whose small belly bulged with pregnancy. "The Triarchy frequently looted our ships. Whether Daemon privately looted theirs or not is a matter of interpretation."

"A war only drags everyone down," the old woman retorted defiantly.

With a cold expression, Rhaenyra backhanded another slap across Lady Swann's face, chiding, "Without war, where is peace?"

Turning to the assembled noblewomen, Rhaenyra addressed them solemnly. "Rhaegar has never attempted to invade any castle. All these accusations are the fantasies of the foolish."

Pointing at Lady Swann again, Rhaenyra sneered, "If I remember correctly, Lord Swann's only niece, Johanna Swann, was kidnapped by pirates from the Triarchy years ago. The Lord refused to pay her ransom, and she was trafficked several times."

Seeing the old woman's trembling gaze, Rhaenyra continued, "If Daemon has been plundering Triarchy ships, I'd like to see him rescue Johanna from her captivity."

Grasping the solid gold pendant around Lady Swann's neck, Rhaenyra said, "I believe Daemon won't demand a ransom to allow Lord Swann to rescue his only niece."

With a victorious air, Rhaenyra pulled Laena aside and walked out of the tent. Laena, whose dark complexion had darkened further in anger, spat at the old woman, "Bitch!"

A pair of twins followed their mother and foster mother, making faces at the old woman as they exited. The tent fell into a tense silence.

Alicent stood speechless, replaying Rhaenyra's reprimand in her mind. The embarrassment of being lectured by her stepdaughter in front of everyone was palpable.

Rubbing her temples, Alicent accidentally picked at her fingernails, wincing as tears came to her eyes from the pain.

Beside her, Lady Swann, drenched in red wine and with a swollen, reddened face, covered herself in indignation and left the tent.

The other noblewomen exchanged glances, their silence speaking volumes. Most of them represented Stormlands families and had come to gauge the royal family's stance.

Lady Swann had been their spokesperson to test the waters. It was now clear that the royal family had a firm and uncompromising attitude towards Stormlands.

At that moment, the Kingsguard, Arryk Cargyll, hurriedly entered the tent and whispered to Alicent, "Your Grace, Prince Aegon has struck Miss Cassandra."

Alicent's face changed color as she lifted her skirts and walked out, muttering, "Thank you, Ser Erryk."

"It's Arryk, Your Grace," he corrected gently.

"Oh, of course, Ser Arryk," Alicent replied distractedly, her mind on Aegon. All she wanted now was to confront her son and ask why he had assaulted the girl meant to be his future wife.

As Alicent and Arryk left, the noblewomen stared at each other in confusion, trying to interpret the situation.

Larys Strong, bent over his scepter, watched Alicent's departing figure. He sensed an opportunity to further intensify the conflict and sow chaos.

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### The Main Tent of the Camp

The lively atmosphere was boisterous, with a group of advisers and nobles surrounding the king, drinking and enjoying themselves. Viserys smiled and excused himself, his tired body unable to keep up with the revelry.

Rhaegar sat at the lower end of the main seat, one hand propped on his chin and one leg crossed, an island of serenity amidst the chaos.

"Rhaegar, what did you want to see me about?" Viserys asked, wiping sweat from his brow.

Rhaegar rubbed his brow and spoke softly, "It's nothing major. I've noticed the medicine prepared by the Grand Maester isn't very effective. I've chosen a new maester for your treatment."

"Mellos has done a good job. He's been handling my injuries," Viserys replied, frowning in confusion, reluctant to replace the familiar old man.

"Father, your injuries aren't improving. It's better to try a new medicine," Rhaegar patiently explained. "Orwyle is cautious and a maester you know well. He will perform his duties just as diligently."

There was a deep helplessness in Rhaegar's heart. After reading the brief history of the court recorded by Grand Maester Mellos, he had become deeply skeptical.

The history covered a wide range of topics in meticulous detail, including his birth, his mother Queen Aemma's death in childbirth, and his own coma before the age of three. Even personal matters like Rhaenyra losing her virginity and his first intimate encounter with Jayne were described in writing.

However, the treatment and medication for Viserys were very vaguely documented in this otherwise detailed history. Only some bloodletting, maggot therapy, and abscess scraping were recorded. The medications used were few and showed little effect. Despite this, Mellos did not actively change the treatment plan and suppressed aides like Orwyle, who advocated for changes.

Rhaegar had good reason to suspect Mellos of ulterior motives. If he didn't want to alert the schemers, he would have already imprisoned Mellos for interrogation. He suspected something was wrong with the Citadel.

Seeing his resolute eldest son, Viserys sighed and nodded in agreement. He also felt that Mellos' treatment was ineffective, and a new approach might bring improvement.

After a moment of silence, Rhaegar rubbed his smooth chin and said, "Father, the Kingswood hunt will end in a few days. Have you made any plans to tame the dragons?"

For the past month, his father had avoided answering. With his trip to Dragonstone Island imminent, it was time to remind him properly.

"Dragonstone Island..." Viserys' face paled, and he averted his eyes. He very much wanted to tame a dragon but was daunted by the risks involved.

Seeing this, Rhaegar said no more, understanding his father's dilemma. Determination was crucial for taming a dragon.

Suddenly, a commotion came from outside. Immediately after, an indignant Borros walked into the main tent, followed by his cousin Rhaenys and her four daughters. The girls were silently weeping, their dresses covered in mud and dirt, their faces red and bruised.

Otto then entered, pulling a dirty Helaena and Aemond by their hands.

In Rhaegar and Viserys' astonished gazes, Rhaenys stepped forward with her arm around Cassandra and sighed helplessly, "The children of the two families fought, and Aegon, who started it, ran into the Kingswood."

Chapter 303: Larys's Prying Eyes

"Brother."

The words barely escaped Helaena's lips before she deflated, looking at Rhaegar with a resigned expression.

"What's going on, come here quickly," Rhaegar beckoned hastily, noticing her tear-streaked face.

Helaena broke away from Grandfather Otto's grasp and trotted into her brother's arms. Rhaegar glanced at Borros Baratheon and then caressed Helaena's face, frowning. "What happened?"

"A fight," Helaena sniffled pitifully. "Aegon hit Cassandra. They went to fight Aegon, and Aemond and I tried to stop them but got caught up in it."

She was only thirteen, and Aemond, two years younger, had fared worse in the scuffle.

Rhaegar sighed heavily, rubbing his temples. "Seven hells!"

It's just a children's quarrel.

Viserys, now grasping the situation, asked Rhaenys for a full account. Rhaenys, ever the unbiased observer, relayed the events clearly and without taking sides.

Bang—

Viserys slammed his wine cup down in anger. "Damn it, beating a girl and then running away!" His fury was directed at Aegon, who had struck Cassandra and fled into the Kingswood, avoiding punishment and escaping an unwanted betrothal.

Borros, red-faced, held his second daughter, Maris, close. "Your Grace, you invited my daughters here for a marriage proposal, but Prince Aegon's behavior is intolerable."

Having just been reprimanded by the king and forced to execute five loyal bannermen, Borros had hoped the matter would be resolved. Instead, his daughters had been assaulted by a Targaryen prince. To maintain his honor, he sought Rhaenys' support.

Viserys frowned deeply and spoke in a somber tone. "Borros, this was not authorized by me. I will find Aegon and provide you with an explanation."

It was a severe breach of decorum to assault a prospective bride.

Borros bit back his words, seeking justice. Rhaenys, noting the amused nobles around them, lowered her voice. "Viserys, Aegon must apologize to House Baratheon. They need to save face."

"Agreed," Viserys said, forcing a smile at the Baratheon girls. "Aegon will be disciplined. I'll ensure new companions entertain you."

Despite the incident, he was determined to secure an alliance. Without it, he felt uneasy about Borros' control over the Stormlands.

Cassandra's eyes lit up, the corners of her bruised eyes flicking towards Rhaegar with anticipation. "Who will entertain us?"

Viserys smiled, understanding her implication. "My two youngest sons will be considered."

He waved at Rhaegar. "Our patrols failed. You lead the team to retrieve Aegon."

Rhaegar understood, patting Helaena's back. "Father, Helaena and Aemond are hurt too. Don't forget to comfort them."

Helaena, looking aggrieved, approached her father. She had also been pushed and shoved.

Leaving Viserys to manage the situation, Rhaegar cast a glance at the silent Otto before exiting the tent.

Just outside, he collided with Alicent, rushing in after hearing the news.

"Where's Aegon? What happened to Helaena and Aemond?" Alicent demanded, her voice full of concern.

Rhaegar shrugged as he continued walking. With Alicent around, Helaena and Aemond were sure to be well cared for.

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At night, the stars dotted the sky, with dark clouds obscuring the bright moonlight.

On a winding path through the Kingswood, a dozen miles or so from the camp...

A white horse galloped along, Rhaegar on its back, with Aegon trailing behind, tethered by a rope and struggling to keep up.

"Rhaegar, stop! I can't run anymore!"

Aegon was dizzy with exhaustion, his legs giving out, nearly dragging him along the ground.

Rhaegar ignored his pleas, cracking his whip against the horse's flank, urging it to go faster.

"Hey! Are you even listening? I really can't go on!"

Aegon panted heavily, stumbling and nearly in tears.

After another mile, Aegon finally collapsed with a wail, being dragged along the dirt path.

"Phew."

Rhaegar called the horse to a halt, dropped his whip, and dismounted.

Aegon lay limply on the ground, his clothes torn, revealing a reddened, bruised back.

"I'm sorry, I really am."

Seeing Rhaegar approaching, Aegon, terrified, kicked his legs in a futile attempt to escape, despite his bound hands.

Rhaegar grabbed him by the collar, amused. "Why aren't you escaping on a dragon?"

Aegon cried out, too frightened to move. "Your Cannibal is searching for Sunfyre, who's hiding from me."

He had hoped to escape on a dragon, but reality had crushed that plan.

Rhaegar laughed and then asked sternly, "Do you know what this counts as?"

"What counts?" Aegon asked warily, trying to back away.

Rhaegar's smile vanished. "Count yourself unlucky."

As he struck Aegon, he lectured him, "You're not a man yet! You hit a woman and then ran away! Do you think Father won't hack you to pieces?"

Rhaegar had spent half a day chasing the drunken Aegon, finally catching him by a small stream. Now, he needed to vent his frustration.

"Stop, I'm sorry..."

Aegon couldn't dodge, hunching over and crying out, "I didn't like those girls! Why do I have to marry them?"

"It's a family marriage! You think you can just do whatever you want?"

Rhaegar was furious. He yanked up the trembling Aegon and demanded, "You don't want to marry the daughters of House Baratheon. Do you want to marry Helaena instead?"

"No! She's worse than the Four Storms!"

Aegon shook his head vigorously, tugging at the corner of his bleeding mouth, pleading, "I want to marry a great beauty, even if she's of lower status. Leave the Four Storms to Aemond and Daeron."

Rhaegar was exasperated. "How can you be so foolish, ruining your Grandfather's plans for nothing?"

Tired of beating him, Rhaegar untied the rope binding Aegon to the horse, slung him over the horse's back, and remounted.

He didn't care if Aegon was secure, riding back to the camp without a second glance.

In less than half a quarter of an hour, the camp gate loomed close.

Entering the camp, Rhaegar dragged Aegon to the main tent and handed him over to their father for punishment.

"Aegon!"

Alicent, already in the tent, gasped in distress at the sight of her son's bruised and swollen face.

"Alicent, stand down," Viserys commanded, his patience wearing thin. He didn't want to see his wife coddling Aegon any longer.

Alicent glared at him, her pain evident. "Aegon is all beaten up. Call the Grand Maester to tend to him at once," she insisted, her voice firm as she directed the second part at Arryk, the Kingsguard standing at the entrance.

Viserys sighed deeply and advised, "Leave. Aegon will apologize to the Four Storms and face the consequences of his actions."

"Don't forget, Aegon is your son too," Alicent retorted sadly. Though she dared not openly defy Viserys, she walked out indignantly, her eyes briefly flashing with anger as she passed Rhaegar.

She knew it was Rhaegar who had inflicted the injuries on Aegon.

Rhaegar remained impassive, unaffected by her silent accusation. In his eyes, Aegon, spoiled and irresponsible, needed a hard lesson. To Rhaegar, Aegon's reckless behavior was more of a liability to the family.

Once Alicent left, the tension in the tent eased slightly.

With no outsiders present, Viserys forced Aegon to apologize to Cassandra and then to each of her three sisters.

With Rhaenys acting as guarantor, Borros dared not escalate the issue further. Instead, he instructed his daughters to apologize to Helaena and Aemond, who had been caught in the crossfire.

The siblings were genuinely offended to have been dragged into the dispute.

Finally, Viserys adopted a more kingly demeanor, smiling kindly. "Borros, the matter of marriage is negotiable. Let the children communicate more in private."

Borros grimaced, casting a scrutinizing glance from the defiant Aegon to the plain and unimpressive Aemond. The king's third son was still young, underappreciated, and crucially, dragonless.

After much consideration and fearing further trouble with the king, Borros relented, "The daughters of House Baratheon hold no grudges. Both sides will get along."

Aemond hung his head, still unaware that he was now considered as Aegon's replacement. He was lost in thoughts of the earlier argument, wondering if having a dragon of his own would have allowed him to confront the Four Storms with dragonfire.

Unconsciously, he clenched his fists at the thought.

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In the camp, the nobles gathered around a roaring bonfire.

Some had witnessed Rhaegar dragging Aegon on horseback, while others had seen the afternoon clash between Aegon and the daughters of House Baratheon. Whispers spread about the growing tension between the crown and House Baratheon.

Alicent stormed out of the tent, the cool night air lashing her face and reviving her frayed nerves.

"Your Grace, the Queen."

A low, emotion-laden voice called out from nearby.

Alicent turned, her green skirt fluttering in the wind as she tilted her head proudly. She saw a secluded corner table away from the bonfire's glow.

Larys, with his scepter, sat alone on a wooden stool, watching her with a coy smile.

Feeling Alicent's stern gaze, Larys shifted uncomfortably and ducked his head.

He stared at the ground, avoiding eye contact as if afraid someone might see through his façade.

"What do you want with me?" Alicent asked, scanning the surroundings before walking gracefully toward the corner.

The dimly lit area, strewn with leftovers and ignored by the revelers, suited Larys's secretive nature perfectly.

Larys smiled, "Queen, you seem to need a reliable ally."

Chapter 304: The Plan to Occupy Storm's End

"I'm doing just fine. I don't need allies," Alicent retorted, her voice sharp with frustration.

Larys's gaze fell to the Queen's feet, barely visible beneath her skirt. "It's not that you don't need allies," he replied calmly, "but that you haven't found the right ones."

Alicent's annoyance flared. "Rhaegar sits high on his pedestal. My children are just pawns for him. Where do you expect me to find an ally who can compete with that?"

As heir, Rhaegar's power and reputation were indisputable. No one dared to challenge him openly.

"Don't be in such a hurry," Larys said, his eyes fluttering with a mix of patience and calculation. "I've already chosen my allies. We just need a bit more leverage."

Alicent noticed his gaze and tugged her skirt to cover her feet. "My father has his own plans," she said dismissively. "He prioritizes family interests."

When Otto returned to King's Landing, he had been entangled in the street rectification program for three years. Now that he had regained some influence in the Small Council, he focused solely on benefiting himself and his house, with little thought for her struggles.

"No, I'm not counting on the cunning Lord Otto," Larys smiled apologetically. "His sophistication isn't what I'm banking on."

"Get to the point. I need to rest," Alicent said impatiently.

Larys remained composed, his eyes gleaming with precision. "Prince Aegon rejected the Four Storms. Given the king's character, he will likely choose another prince for the marriage."

Alicent's eyes widened as she picked at her nails, suddenly realizing the implications. In her anger, she had overlooked Viserys's cautious nature. Aegon had refused the Four Storms, and she had been pleased, thinking she could pair him with Helaena. But now, she saw that Aemond was the next likely candidate for the union.

"It seems you've thought this through," Larys said, resting his chin on his scepter. "House Baratheon is stronger than they appear. If Prince Aemond marries one of Lord Borros's daughters, then—"

"Impossible," Alicent interjected, regaining her composure. "Borros is reckless and selfish. Even if Aemond marries one of his daughters, he will only serve those on the Iron Throne."

Rhaegar's position was unshakeable, and her son would be nothing more than a tool in this alliance—a reality well understood by any noble.

Larys gazed at her silently, then spoke softly, "Queen, what if the person in charge of Storm's End is not Lord Borros?"

"Lord Borros is the sole heir of the Baratheon lineage," Alicent retorted sharply. "He is the de facto ruler of Storm's End."

Larys's eyes twinkled as he responded, "Yes, everyone knows Lord Borros has no brothers or sons. But if something were to happen to him, who would take over Storm's End?"

Alicent felt a chill run down her spine as she realized the implication. Her nails dug into her palm. "What... what are you suggesting?"

Larys smiled faintly. "Queen, I suggest you encourage Prince Aemond to marry one of the Four Storms, preferably Cassandra, the eldest. That way, the succession would be most secure."

"You're insane!" Alicent hissed, her eyes blazing. "Borros is a formidable lord with countless guards. How could we even consider such a thing?"

"How?" Larys remained unfazed. "If you trust me, simply persuade Prince Aemond."

Alicent's heart pounded as she asked, "Even if this succeeds, who are the allies?"

Larys stood, using his scepter for support. "After hearing Lady Swann's accusation, I had my little birds investigate Prince Daemon's movements. He has indeed been plundering Triarchy ships and has been seen in Volantis."

"What does that mean?" Alicent was confused.

Larys lowered his voice. "Someone is planning a war, and a war needs an army. A sea fleet from Storm's End would be invaluable."

With that, Larys smiled slyly and hobbled away, his iron shoes clinking softly.

He had made his intentions clear: seize control of Storm's End and ally with those plotting the war.

Alicent stood frozen, contemplating the feasibility of Larys's plan. She did not utter a word to stop him, realizing that his scheme, though risky, could significantly bolster her power.

...

Rhaegar glanced around at the crowd gathered around the fire, the flames casting flickering shadows. He tightened his lapels and headed for his tent, eager to escape the raucous shouting and the pungent smell of stale wine that permeated the air. His father and the advisors would revel all night, but Rhaegar preferred solitude.

As he passed a dimly lit, secluded area, two figures caught his attention: Alicent in her green gown and Larys Strong, leaning on his scepter. Rhaegar stopped and hid behind a ribboned column, watching them discreetly. He knew they had been meeting in secret for some time, and had always rebuffed Larys's advances.

Curiosity piqued, Rhaegar watched as Larys struggled to leave, using his scepter for support. Alicent lingered for a moment before quickly walking away in a different direction. Once they were out of sight, Rhaegar stepped out from behind the column, a probing look in his eyes.

"What moves is Alicent up to again?" he muttered, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

He pondered for a moment, then continued towards his tent. Alicent's recent annoyance stemmed from the complications around Aegon and Helaena's marriage. She probably blamed him for beating Aegon and was disgruntled, but beyond that, he couldn't fathom her motives.

"I'll need to bring Tormund back from the Mushroom Set," Rhaegar mused silently. "His eyes are sharper than mine."

With this thought, he quickened his pace.

...

Several days passed in the blink of an eye, bringing the Kingswood hunt to its final day.

It was still early morning, and the sun's rays filtered through the dense canopy, casting a serene glow over the silent forest.

"Rhaegar, wake up."

Inside the tent, Rhaenyra, already dressed, sat on the edge of the bed, gently shaking Rhaegar. His brows were furrowed, lost in a vivid dream.

In his dream, he wandered through rolling hills and dense forests, with streams gurgling and birds chirping merrily on the branches. Suddenly, a majestic White Hart emerged from the shrubs, gracefully leaping over a stream and landing on the rocky shore opposite.

"Yooooo..."

The White Hart tilted its head and bleated softly, lowering itself to drink from the stream.

Whoosh—

A dark arrow shot through the air, striking the White Hart's neck with deadly precision. The arrowhead, gleaming with an ebony light, pierced deep into its flesh.

"Yooooo..."

The White Hart let out a pained wail, collapsing to the ground and thrashing its hooves. It soon lay dying in a pool of blood.

The dream shattered.

Rhaegar groggily opened his eyes, his face blank with the remnants of the dream. Rhaenyra frowned, pinching his ear playfully but firmly.

"Today is the last hunt, Rhaegar. Don't make Father wait."

Rhaegar rubbed his eyes and groaned. "Got it, I'm getting up."

He rose, bare-chested, and suddenly wrapped his arms around Rhaenyra's slender waist, planting a kiss on her cheek.

"Rhaegar!"

Rhaenyra's face turned a deep shade of red as she playfully slapped him a few times. After a brief moment of teasing, Rhaegar donned his black hunting clothes and stepped out of the tent.

He looked up at the rising sun, exhaling a deep breath.

"I dreamed of the White Hart," he murmured, shaking his head in wonder. "It was killed."

Determined, he added, "I need to find it before some noble hunts it down for real."

With a renewed sense of purpose, Rhaegar set off into the Kingswood.

...

After a busy day of hunting, nightfall brought the nobles back to camp for one last grand bonfire. The central bonfire illuminated the camp, casting a warm glow over an open-air table laden with food and wine, enhancing the revelry.

Rhaegar reclined in a quieter corner, resting his head on Rhaenyra's lap. Rhaenyra sliced a piece of sizzling lamb and fed it to him, casually asking, "What did you catch today?"

"Nothing," Rhaegar replied, accepting the bite and rubbing his head. "I spent the day watching. No game, but that's alright."

The White Hart from his dream had not appeared, leaving the vision unconfirmed.

Rhaenyra raised an eyebrow but didn't press further. If Rhaegar said it was fine, she trusted him. She turned her head slightly, observing the chaotic celebration by the bonfire.

Nobles gathered there in high spirits. Viserys stood by the flames, a bottle of Summer Red in hand, laughing heartily with his brother Daemon. Daemon, looking slightly exasperated, patted Viserys on the shoulder and helped him to a seat at the table.

"My lord, let me refill your wine," came a soft, charming female voice.

Daemon glanced over and saw Borros Baratheon, seated at a neighboring table, boasting loudly with his bannermen. His dinner plate was piled high with food.

A voluptuous woman approached Borros's table. She had flaming red lips, black wavy hair, green eyes, and moved with a seductive grace. As she poured Borros another drink, he laughed, mistaking her for a maid and reaching out to grope her. She deftly dodged his hand, giving him a playful wink before turning away.

Her eyes caught Daemon's interested gaze. She smiled and made her way over, her hips swaying.

"Prince, you are so handsome," she said, winking as she drew closer.

Daemon, ever the connoisseur of beauty, couldn't help but notice her generous curves. Even for him, accustomed to the company of many women, her figure was remarkable.

#### Chapter 305: Death of a Stag

The next day dawned with the campfire extinguished and most still recovering from the previous night's revelry. A lacquered white luxury carriage, escorted by silver-armored Kingsguard, slowly left the camp, heading back to King's Landing. The King's family was the first to depart after the Kingswood hunt.

Compared to their arrival, the entourage now included a slightly smaller, more exquisite carriage. Inside, the spacious compartment accommodated several figures. Aemond sat alone, his head hanging down as he picked at his fingers, lost for words.

To his left were the Four Storms of House Baratheon, the four sisters arranged from eldest to youngest. Cassandra, the eldest, occasionally stole glances at Aemond while chatting with her sisters. The king and queen had specially invited the sisters to accompany the royal caravan to give them more time to bond with their prospective marriage partner.

Opposite the Four Storms, Rhaenyra, dressed in black, sat beside Laena, who wore a plain white dress. A dark-skinned girl rested in Laena's arms.

Daemon's family had also joined the caravan back to King's Landing, planning to sail from Blackwater Bay to Dragonstone Island, with Daemon's family returning to Driftmark Island along the way. Rhaenys, however, did not accompany them; she was a guest of her cousin Borros at Storm's End Castle.

As the carriage creaked and clattered along, the atmosphere inside was surprisingly dull. Rhaenyra glanced at Laena, both bored. The main focus should have been on Aemond and the Four Storms, but Aemond's quiet nature and the sisters' reluctance to engage made the situation awkward.

Unable to bear the oppressive silence, Baela, leaning on Rhaenyra's lap, piped up, "Princess, when will my little dragon hatch?" Her question immediately drew everyone's attention.

Baela and Rhaena, both three years old, inherited their mother Laena's exquisite beauty. Baela cradled a green dragon egg, while Rhaena held a black and red one on Laena's lap. Cassandra glanced enviously at the dragon eggs.

Rhaenyra thought for a moment and offered encouragement, "Don't worry, your little dragon will come out of the egg sooner or later."

Baela nodded vigorously, reassured. "Uh-huh."

"Mother, what about my dragon egg?" Rhaena, shy by nature, echoed her sister's query, holding up her egg.

Laena kissed her tenderly and said, "Patience pays off. Your dragon egg will hatch a beautiful baby dragon."

Rhaena smiled shyly, snuggling back with her dragon egg. The Four Storms exchanged glances, envy and jealousy flickering in their eyes.

Cassandra straightened her dress and folded her hands in her lap, her eyes burning with determination as she looked at Aemond. Maris, the second eldest, pulled a handful of colorful candies from her pocket, offering them to Aemond like a peace offering.

The youngest two sisters, still too young to engage directly, sat helplessly, their gazes fixed on the dragon eggs. The simple-minded longing of the four little girls was evident; they yearned for the dragon eggs just as much as their cousins.

...

A day later, in King's Landing, near the River Gate:

Outside the pier, a majestic three-masted royal ship sailed into Blackwater Bay, proudly displaying the flag of the three-headed red dragon.

"Hee hee, come catch me!" A peal of silver-bell laughter rang out, accompanied by a flurry of footsteps.

On the wide deck, a group of children were engrossed in play. Among them were Helaena Targaryen, Aemond, Daeron, Baela, Rhaena, and the Four Storms of Baratheon.

Seventeen-year-old Cassandra, the oldest, tried to join the game, blocking the path of the younger ones. Her sixteen-year-old sister, Maris, stayed close to Aemond, skillfully blending into the game while keeping a keen eye on her target.

"Aemond, we'll compete in swordplay later," Maris suggested.

Helaena, sitting quietly to the side, tended to the youngest Baela sister.

"Yeah," Aemond replied distractedly, not really focusing on Maris' challenge. His mind was preoccupied with his mission and the dream of taming a dragon on Dragonstone Island.

Cassandra's smile faded as she exchanged a look with Maris. Maris frowned, her reluctance evident.

"Go!" Cassandra commanded with a sharp glare.

Not daring to defy her elder sister, Maris reluctantly ran towards Helaena, using the excuse of chasing Daeron.

With her eyes closed, she collided hard into Helaena.

"Bang..."

Helaena, caught off guard, fell, her forehead striking the deck.

"Ah..! That hurts~" she cried out. Luckily, the blanket beneath her softened the impact, though her forehead turned red.

Seeing this, Aemond instantly became furious and rushed forward, "What are you doing, bumping into my sister?"

The force of the collision had also knocked Maris onto the deck. Without the cushion of a blanket, her bare elbows and knees were scraped and bruised.

Aemond pulled her aside as he tried to check on Helaena.

Tears welled up in Helaena's eyes as she clutched her reddened forehead.

"Sister, are you okay?" Aemond asked anxiously, reaching out to touch her.

But then, Helaena's body stiffened, her tearful eyes lost their luster, and in an eerie tone, she said, "The stag's carcass is being eaten!"

With those words, she rose from the blanket and, holding her trembling body, walked towards the cabin.

Aemond stood frozen, bewildered, "Stag carcasses?"

He hesitated, wanting to follow and call out to his sister, but seeing her tense nerves, he withdrew his hand, unsure of what to do.

...

Not long afterward, far away on a dirt road in the Stormlands:

Several Storm Knights carrying the banner of the Baratheon stag led the way, followed by a luxurious carriage. From inside, the Lord's rough and boisterous laughter occasionally echoed.

Inside the carriage were Borros, his wife Elenda, and their guest, Rhaenys. Borros sat in the center, flanked by the two ladies seated opposite each other.

"Cousin, try this delicacy, the foie gras is as tender as cotton," Borros said, devouring the food with knife and fork in hand, taking hearty gulps of wine.

Rhaenys, however, remained calm, showing no appetite. Elenda, noticing her disinterest, attempted to engage her in conversation to pass the time.

As they chatted, an unexpected incident occurred.

Suddenly, Borros's face contorted, and his knife and fork clattered to the floor. Clutching his stomach, he groaned in pain. "Ouch! My stomach!"

Elenda, alarmed, quickly assisted her husband. "What's going on? I told you to eat less; you've been bloated for the last two days."

Borros, a valiant warrior with a hearty appetite, groaned, "It hurts, my stomach feels like it's going to burst."

The pain escalated rapidly. Borros winced, fell to the floor, and began to spasm uncontrollably.

"Borros! Are you okay?" Elenda cried out in panic.

Realizing something was seriously wrong, Rhaenys rushed to the carriage door and shouted, "Someone, the lord is sick! Quickly, call the maester!"

Within moments, Borros was unable to speak, his face turning blue and purple as blood bubbled from his eyes. As the maester arrived and opened the door, Borros stretched his neck, let out a final, agonized roar, and then fell silent.

The maester examined the body, lifting Borros's clothes to reveal a swollen, rock-hard stomach. "The lord is dead," he announced fearfully.

"No! How could this be?" Elenda shrieked, unable to accept her husband's sudden death. "Borros! Wake up! How can you leave me behind?!"

The maester retreated, too frightened to say more.

Rhaenys sat in shock, staring at her cousin's tragic end. After a moment, she regained her composure and called over the maester. "Write a letter to King's Landing, informing them of Borros's death."

"Yes, Princess," the maester replied, trembling as he left the carriage.

Rhaenys leaned back, wiping her wrinkled forehead and taking deep breaths. Borros had died before her eyes. Her gaze fell on Borros's swollen belly, and her eyes narrowed as she murmured, "Just like Uncle Baelon..."

...

Nightfall, Blackwater Bay

The sea was calm, a gentle breeze guiding the royal ship along its course. Inside the cabin, Rhaegar walked down the corridor and knocked on Helaena's door.

During dinner, Helaena's maid had reported that she wasn't feeling well and had skipped the meal. Upon learning that she had been injured earlier in the day, Rhaegar became worried about his sister and decided to check on her.

Knock, knock...

"Helaena, are you hungry?" Rhaegar asked tentatively.

Silence.

Rhaegar's concern deepened, and he raised his hand to knock again. Since taming Dreamfyre, Helaena had become more cheerful and resilient. It wasn't like her to ignore him.

“Don’t bother; she won’t answer you,” a somber voice said from behind.

Rhaegar turned to see Aemond emerging from the corridor’s shadows, holding a baguette. Aemond looked downcast, his head hung low.

Rhaegar immediately sensed that Aemond knew more than he was letting on. “Aemond, do you know what happened to Helaena?”

“Probably,” Aemond whispered, nodding. “After she got hit, she started talking about a stag carcass, silkworms, and some other nonsense. Then she just... shut down.”

“A stag carcass?” Rhaegar muttered.

“Yes, she said it was a stag,” Aemond confirmed.

Rhaegar closed his eyes, deep in thought. Helaena had likely experienced a prophetic vision and was now isolating herself. He remembered dreaming of the White Hart’s death the previous night, assuming it was related to the Kingswood.

But Helaena’s vision was clearer: a stag carcass and silkworms. Suddenly, it clicked.

“Baratheon?” he said, shocked. The stag, a symbol of House Baratheon, could only mean trouble for them.

Realizing the urgency, Rhaegar hurried down the corridor. He needed to act fast. As he passed Aemond, he patted his shoulder. “Remember, Helaena hasn’t eaten. Look after her, little brother.”

Without waiting for a response, Rhaegar left.

...

Soon, he returned to his room. Opening the door, he saw Rhaenyra brushing her hair at the dresser, with a maid attending to her.

“Rhaegar?” Rhaenyra looked surprised as he entered hastily.

“I need to send someone on an urgent errand,” Rhaegar replied, his gaze shifting to the maid. “Sara, you must take a small boat and return to King’s Landing immediately, then go to Storm’s End.”

Rhaegar couldn’t leave, he still had to go to Dragonstone.

Chapter 306: The Sheepstealer Who Arrived At the Right Time

The foreign beauty remained calm, meeting Rhaenyra’s gaze in the mirror.

“Go,” Rhaenyra said with a nod.

“Yes, Princess,” Sara replied softly, retrieving a black robe from a drawer before exiting the room.

As she passed Rhaegar, he issued a quick command, “Keep an eye on Borros.”

“No problem,” she assured, disappearing into the depths of the corridor.

Alone with his sister, Rhaenyra turned to Rhaegar, curiosity evident. "What happened?"

"A dream and a prophecy," Rhaegar replied, eyes glinting as he casually closed the door.

Rhaenyra tilted her head, continuing to brush her long, silky hair. "Something wrong with Borros?"

Her skepticism was understandable. Rhaegar had many capable men, strategically placed across the realm. However, he trusted only two women implicitly: Sara, of mysterious origin, and Skylar, the bastard daughter of House Celtigar.

Because of their unique positions, Rhaenyra had assigned Sara and Skylar to safeguard Rhaenyra and Jeyne, respectively. This dual role was why Sara had checked with Rhaenyra before acting.

Rhaegar walked behind Rhaenyra, gently taking the comb from her hand. He began to stroke her long, silver-gold hair, his movements soothing.

Staring into the mirror, his thoughts settled, and he sighed softly. "Perhaps."

His prophetic dream, combined with Helaena's vision, seemed too significant to ignore. He couldn't shake the feeling that something ominous was brewing around Borros.

...

Two days later, Dragonstone Island.

Boom...

The tightly closed black stone gate slowly opened, revealing the long steps of the towering stone bridge.

More than a hundred well-equipped guards marched out to welcome the king's family.

Swish Swish...

With a steady and powerful pace, the guards split into two lines, standing tall and proud.

Viserys blanched, swallowing hard. His seasickness had returned, though it was not severe.

Alicent held her husband's hand and their youngest son, Daeron, in the other. She spoke softly, "Go ahead and get some rest."

"Good, everyone is tired," Viserys forced a smile and, hand in hand with his wife, stepped onto the long steps of the stone bridge.

Behind them, Hand of the King Lyonel, Otto, and Grand Maester Mellos followed unhurriedly. Their duties were more pressing than those of the other royal advisers.

The Hand of the King assisted in political affairs, Otto watched over the Four Storms that accompanied them, and the Grand Maester provided wisdom and medical help. Viserys' seasickness had been alleviated by a soothing medication from the Grand Maester.

After the advisers, three adult male heirs, Rhaegar, Daemon, and Aegon, led the way. Rhaenyra held her twin adopted daughters' hands, while Helaena and Aemond walked behind them with the chattering Four Storms.

Daemon had been invited to the island by his brother Viserys to witness his nephew's dragon-taming journey. Laena, pregnant and with limited mobility, had disembarked earlier at Driftmark.

The long steps of the stone bridge, wedged between the black stone gate and the castle, wound several times. After a while, Viserys began to gasp, cold sweat breaking out on his forehead. Glancing at Lyonel and Otto, who seemed unaffected, his competitive spirit flared.

"Ahem..." Viserys coughed lightly and initiated conversation. "This time, for Aemond's dragon taming, which dragon do you think he'll tame?"

Lyonel hesitated before replying cautiously, "Taming dragons is very dangerous. It's enough if the prince can avoid harm."

"Don't be so serious. I'm only asking about that one dragon," Viserys waved his hand with a smile. "Dragons are a Targaryen asset, and I've yet to hear of any Targaryen getting hurt from taming a dragon."

Otto frowned, sensing deeper implications. Grand Maester Mellos raised an eyebrow, crossing his hands in his sleeves. "From memory, Prince Rhaegar attempted to tame Dreamfyre as a young boy, resulting in severe burns on his back."

He remembered treating the wounds himself, a memory that stayed with him. Rhaegar, trailing behind, overheard and glared resentfully.

"Shame," Rhaenyra stifled a snicker.

Rhaegar: ...

What a humiliating moment.

Helaena tilted her head, surveying her brother curiously, not realizing he had been burned by Dreamfyre. A memory from when she was two years old surfaced. She recalled her brother lying injured in bed, and how she used to visit his room to play and blow gently on his wounds.

Her bright eyes flickered as she glanced at her sister, Rhaenyra, glaring subtly. She clearly remembered that it was Rhaenyra who had later found her and forbade her from playing in their brother's room, even hiding her favorite dragon doll.

"Selfish!" Helaena muttered, resentful.

Rhaenyra overheard and asked, "What did you say?"

"Nothing!" Helaena shivered, her little head bobbing rapidly.

She was terrified of this sister, who had not treated her well since childhood. She had heard that if her mother hadn't married her father, she wouldn't have been allowed to call the other woman sister.

Back to the conversation.

Viserys, with a head full of frustrations, sighed, "Rhaegar is an exception. Dreamfyre was being abused by the Dragonkeepers and despite being injured by Dreamfyre, he later succeeded in taming the Wild Dragon Cannibal."

"It was not abuse. Dreamfyre has a violent personality, and Maester Bass was concerned for the safety of the Dragonkeeper," Mellos interjected, defending the maester.

Viserys' face darkened, and he said unhappily, "Does it matter?"

That selfish maester's actions caused his eldest son to be injured, and he remembered it for the rest of his life.

Mellos, realizing he had overstepped, bowed his head and fell silent.

After a few sentences of small talk, the three royal advisers began to understand that the king had other intentions.

Lyonel's eyes twinkled, and he spoke up, "Your Grace, which dragon do you think is the best to tame?"

This was the right question, and Viserys immediately became interested. "Of course, it's Vermithor, my grandfather Jaehaerys's dragon. It's the largest and most irascible adult dragon on Dragonstone Island at the moment."

"Vermithor holds the title of Bronze Fury, and his character has always been horrible. I'm afraid it's not suitable for Prince Aemond," Lyonel responded thoughtfully.

Viserys, simple-minded, considered for a while. "Vermithor is indeed dangerous. Silverwing would be a good choice. It was my grandmother Alyssane's dragon, and it has the most docile character."

There was one more thing unmentioned: Silverwing was close in age to Vermithor and second in size among the masterless dragons.

By this point in the conversation, even Alicent could see Viserys' fondness for dragons.

Otto and his daughter exchanged glances, and Otto casually asked, "There is also a brown dragon called Sheepstealer on Dragonstone Island. I heard its size is not inferior to Caraxes and Meleys."

A flash of hesitation crossed Viserys' eyes, and he shook his head. "Sheepstealer's age is similar to the young dragons, and its size exceeds that of young dragons of the same time period, but its appearance is too unpleasant."

Sheepstealer's scales were an ugly brown clay color, and its wings were brown as well. It was a recognized ugly monster.

Despite his usual indifference to dragons, Viserys secretly knew all the dragons owned by the family.

Lyonel's lips quirked as if he wanted to say something.

Otto kept quiet, observing the king's furrowed brow as he talked about the dragons.

With the topic of interest brought up, Viserys became more and more animated, his originally pale face regaining its color.

A few moments later, Lyonel, whose eyelids were fluttering, could no longer hold his tongue and said stiffly, "Your Grace, remember? Our trip is for Prince Aemond's dragon taming."

"Eh ..." Viserys' voice faltered as he looked at the Hand of the King in dismay.

Lyonel took a deep breath and squeezed out a smile. "Taming dragons is a young man's endeavor. I believe Prince Aemond will succeed."

He sensed the king's desire for dragons. Naturally, he wished for a strong and powerful monarch, a valiant dragon master. However, everything couldn't be done impulsively. From an objective perspective, it was risky for a king to tame a dragon.

Although Viserys had once tamed the black dread Balerion, who knew if he could do it again? One wrong move and the king could be at great risk.

As the Hand of the King, Lyonel couldn't ignore this risk and had to speak out.

Viserys was taken aback, looking at Lyonel with embarrassment and glancing at Otto and Mellos out of the corner of his eye. All three had their heads bowed, saying nothing. Clearly, they were united in their silent opposition.

Frozen for a moment, Viserys regained his composure and forced a smile. "Actually, a lot of it lies in trying, right?"

"....."

Lyonel pursed his lips, unable to bear the king's pleading gaze. Delayed in getting a response, Viserys felt a heavy weight on his chest, holding his breath.

"Baa ....."

Suddenly, the bleating of sheep broke the silence, along with the occasional yell of a shepherd.

"Viserys, are you all right?" Alicent asked, shaking her husband's arm with concern.

"Fine, just a little tired."

Not wanting his wife to see his vulnerability, Viserys withdrew his arm and looked in the direction of the sheep's call. The long steps of the stone bridge were built into the steep mountain range. Looking up, they saw thin clouds and mist; looking down, they saw dense shrubbery.

They were halfway up the hill, located on a low-lying section of the ridge. Viserys rested both hands on the stone bridge, gazing down at a pasture-rich slope below. An unrecognizable shepherd wielded a short whip, driving dozens of goats up the slope, munching on crisp blades of grass.

Clouds, long bridge, wilderness, shepherd... several factors made up a beautiful scene. As this picturesque view unfolded before him, Viserys smiled, feeling a sense of fulfillment knowing his people were living well.

"Roar ....."

Suddenly, the clouds above stirred, and a sharp dragon roar echoed through the long bridge. Viserys looked up in surprise, catching a blur of brown in his vision.

"Baa! ....."

In the next moment, the goats' screams filled the air, desperate and terrified. "Don't! My goat!"

Viserys hastily looked down to see the shepherd paralyzed with fear, wailing miserably. With a slight sideways glance, a brown, decrepit dragon pounced on the ground, its dry, thin claws stomping on the carcasses of two twitching goats.

The grotesque dragon's head, with sunken eye sockets, was raised high, its fangs interlocking as it swallowed a living goat whole.

#### Chapter 307: Breeds of Dragons

Up close to the wild dragon, Viserys narrowed his eyes and blurted out, "Sheepstealer!"

Recognizing the dragon's brown mud-colored scales and emaciated, menacing appearance, he was certain of its identity.

"Your Grace, this is a completely untamed wild dragon. We should stay away," Lyonel warned, his eyes alert. The three royal advisers stepped forward, trying to hold the king back and escort him across the long flight of steps.

Meanwhile, the dragon chewed and swallowed the goat whole in two bites.

"Roar..."

Satisfied with the thrill of the chase, the dragon shook his head and flapped his wings, soaring into the air. Its claws, covered with scaly patches, grasped the goat carcasses, dripping stinking blood.

Viserys, standing directly below, was splattered with blood and dodged frantically. The dragon's nose twitched as it took in the commotion below, its brown-black vertical pupils focused on the group on the steps.

As an untamed wild dragon, Sheepstealer had little to do but steal sheep and attack sheepdogs. As Viserys lifted his cloak over his head, he got a clear look at the dragon.

Brown mud-colored scales covered its body, broad brown wings flapped, and its dry dragon head, slightly rounded, was topped with irregular rhomboid horns instead of the typical dragon horns. The dragon was large but bony, as if its scales barely covered its skeleton, with sharp claws growing from its feet.

"It is ugly indeed," Viserys marveled at the dragon's appearance.

"Roar..."

The dragon hovered, its pupils staring down, and with a mischievous roar it released the goat carcass.

"Dodge!" Viserys shouted, tearing at his cloak as he lunged for his wife and young son.

Pfft...

The goat carcass crashed down in the middle of the line, hot blood spilling out, mixed with chunks of freshly minced meat. Viserys, close to the wall, covered his head and wrapped his arms around Alicent and Daeron beneath him.

On the other side, Lyonel and the others couldn't dodge in time. Despite lying on their backs, they were splattered with blood and flesh.

"How are you doing?" Viserys lifted his cloak, nervously checking his wife and son's well-being.

"I'm fine, check on my father and the others," Alicent said, holding the dazed Daeron tightly.

Viserys looked up, seeing Lyonel and the others sprawled on the floor, motionless, with a dead sheep lying across the steps. The white wool was soaked in blood, with one front leg intact.

Above, thin clouds drifted, and the sun shed silken spots of light. The dragon was nowhere to be seen.

Not far behind, the lagging line stirred. Hearing the unfamiliar dragon roar, Rhaegar let go of Rhaena's small hand, intent on rushing to his father's side.

"Roar..."

A salty sea breeze blew, carrying a faint smell of goat and the excited roar of a mischievous dragon. Rhaegar paused, tilting his head in surprise.

The dragons of Dragonstone Island typically nested around Dragonmont and rarely ventured near the castle or the long steps of the stone bridge.

"Roar..."

A strong wind swept through the air as Sheepstealer emerged from the mountain ridge beside the stone bridge, flapping its wings above Rhaegar's group. Its ugly head, high in the air, looked down at the crowd below, reveling in its recent success.

"Be careful, it's a wild dragon," Rhaegar warned, pulling Rhaenyra and Helaena behind him. The dragons on Dragonstone Island usually kept to themselves, causing minimal disturbance to the residents.

Vermithor and Silverwing were sleeping in Dragonmont, while Cannibal and Grey Ghost had largely moved away. Sheepstealer was the only wild dragon that occasionally appeared, poaching sheep and tormenting herders' dogs.

Rhaegar noticed the bloody goat in Sheepstealer's claws and realized it had just succeeded in its hunt. The dragon's vertical pupils swept over Rhaegar, Daemon, Rhaenyra, and Helaena, a flash of scorn in its eyes. It smelled the presence of its own kind and disliked the putrid odor of the dragon-eating species it sensed on Rhaegar.

"Father..."

Feeling Sheepstealer's scrutinizing gaze, Baela and Rhaena curled up behind Daemon, one hugging his thigh. Daemon's brows knitted together, his right hand gripping the hilt of his sword as he observed the dragon's every move. He didn't panic, knowing the dragon wouldn't attack humans without reason, especially after a successful hunt.

In contrast, the Four Storms shrieked in shock, hiding behind Aemond. "Che, childish," Aemond muttered, ignoring them. Standing on his tiptoes, his eyes burned into the giant dragon above.

Sheepstealer's size impressed Aemond. It surpassed Caraxes and was slightly smaller than Dreamfyre. His eyes lit up with excitement, "A dragon! A good-sized wild dragon!"

However, upon seeing Sheepstealer's true appearance, Aemond's face crumpled in disappointment. "What an ugly dragon!" he muttered. He wanted a dragon big enough to prove himself, but Sheepstealer's appearance was off-putting. His facial expression shifted between excitement and disappointment, torn as if choosing between pie or jam for breakfast.

"Roar..."

The Sheepstealer cocked its head, its vertical pupils glancing at the silver-haired boy who had been staring at it. As if wondering if the boy was admiring its grace, it flapped its wings, hovering mid-air with its claws clutching the nearly cold goat carcass.

Noticing its movements, Rhaegar stepped back subtly and warned, "Stay away. Sheepstealer is very unpredictable."

Everyone obeyed, sticking close to the walls on either side and spreading out. Rhaegar felt slightly relieved.

On Dragonstone Island, Cannibal and other dragons often roamed nearby waters instead of the island itself. The moment they heard Sheepstealer's roar, Cannibal sensed it and quickly returned.

"Roar!

A low, muffled roar like a bell came from the beach, startling a flock of seabirds nesting in the broken cliffs. The familiar roar reached Sheepstealer's ears, causing it to twist its head in panic. Its vertical pupils showed moments of fear.

Cannibal had returned.

Remembering the times it was hunted as a young dragon and once as an adult, Sheepstealer felt a phantom pain, as if sharp claws as black as charcoal had penetrated its torso.

Sweeping its gaze over the crowd below, Sheepstealer flapped its wings and rose into the air, taking one last glance at the silver-haired boy. Its claws loosened, and the goat carcass was thrown out.

"Watch out!" Rhaegar's face tightened as he turned to shield Rhaenyra and Helaena.

Splat!

The goat carcass hit the stone floor with precision, blood splattering and wool fluttering about. Aemond, crouching closest to the carcass, was splattered with blood.

Taking advantage of the distraction, Sheepstealer turned and fled, grabbing another goat from the wailing shepherd on its way out.

As it left, Cannibal arrived.

Its black wings spread wide, and its huge, mountain-like body quickly broke through the clouds. Rhaegar sighed in relief as his dragon arrived. The power of Cannibal was undeniable, its size nearly matching that of the legendary dragon Vhagar. Its ethereal green dragonfire and extreme speed made it a formidable combatant.

Dragons came in various breeds, forms, and talents. Cannibal's noble bloodline allowed it to grow so fast and huge. To the wild dragons of Dragonstone Island, Cannibal was like an emperor. Neither Sheepstealer nor Grey Ghost dared to provoke it.

"Is everyone alright?" Rhaegar checked on Four Storms and Aemond. The sisters huddled together in fear, while Aemond crouched dumbfounded, wiping goat's blood from his forehead.

"Is everything alright?" Rhaegar half-crouched and locked eyes with him earnestly.

"Fine!" Aemond sprang up, eyes shining with excitement. "Big brother, take me to tame a dragon. I want to tame the strongest dragon!"

Encountering a wild dragon for the first time had awakened a wild desire in Aemond. He wanted to tame not just any dragon, but the most powerful one.

Rhaegar patted his head and said, "Don't daydream. Taming a dragon depends on luck. Dragons choose their riders, not the other way around."

Confirming everyone was fine, Rhaegar hurried to his father. Sheepstealer must have terrorized them earlier. Luckily, this dragon, though mischievous, rarely attacked humans unprovoked, preferring to steal sheep instead.

...

Stone Drum Tower

After the incident with Sheepstealer, the group safely entered the castle.

"Viserys, I'm not feeling well. I'll go rest," Alicent said listlessly, still shaken by the encounter.

As she ascended the stairs, Viserys glanced at Lyonel and the other advisors with a wry smile. "Women are always so delicate, not strong like men."

Before the advisors could respond, Rhaenyra, trailing just behind, interjected. "You're right, father," she said pointedly, taking the hands of her two adopted daughters and heading up the stairs.

"Darling, you know I didn't mean it like that," Viserys called after her, feeling a pang of regret.

Rhaenyra's sensitivity to male chauvinism had slipped his mind.

Rhaegar, observing the exchange, chuckled softly. "She's just tired, father. She won't stay angry."

"By the Seven Gods, I truly misspoke," Viserys sighed.

Rhaegar said nothing more, instead directing the maids to escort his younger siblings and the Four Storms to their quarters. Just as he was about to follow Rhaenyra upstairs, Viserys called him back.

"Rhaegar, wait a moment."

Viserys had also summoned his brother Daemon, Lyonel, and the other royal advisors.

"Your Grace, how can I assist you?" Lyonel asked, both shy and serious.

"Don't be so formal, Lyonel. This isn't about state affairs; it's a personal matter," Viserys clarified, then continued. "My son Aemond wants to tame a dragon, and I share his ambition."

"What do you think?"

Chapter 308: The Dangers of the Citadel

A heavy silence filled the room as Viserys' words hung in the air. Rhaegar looked at his father in surprise, not expecting him to be so direct.

Across the room, Daemon's cold, deep eyes met his. Though Daemon remained still, a flash of surprise crossed his features. He knew his brother well.

Viserys, the good-natured man who avoided conflict and distanced himself from dragons, was now talking about taming one himself.

Daemon, never one to hide his feelings, smirked. "I never thought I'd hear you talk about wanting a dragon, brother."

"That's not the point, Daemon," Viserys replied, shaking his head. "The family is growing stronger by the day. Every child will have a dragon, and it's time an elder managed them."

The sincerity in Viserys's voice was evident as he met Daemon's gaze. His usual carefree demeanor masked a sharp mind. When necessary, he showed his ambition.

The Sea Snake of Driftmark Island had built a formidable legacy over the years. With Daemon's alliance with the Sea Snake, they commanded four dragons: Vhagar, Caraxes, Meleys, and Sea Smoke. Once Laena's twins matured and the child in her womb was born, three more dragons would be added to their ranks.

Viserys's children, Rhaegar and Rhaenyra, held Dragonstone Island and Harrenhal, respectively, and rode Cannibal and Syrax. Viserys himself could tame Vermithor, Silverwing, Sheepstealer, Grey Ghost or Stormcloud.

While their strength seemed unrivaled now, Viserys was aware of potential future conflicts. He and Alicent had three sons and a daughter, three of whom were dragon riders, with one on the verge of taming another.

Though the children currently obeyed their eldest half-brother, Rhaegar, peace was tenuous. In a few years, as they all matured into true dragon riders, tensions could escalate.

Viserys foresaw the possibility of a three-way conflict among Rhaegar, his second son Aegon, and Daemon. To prevent this, he aimed to tame another dragon while he was still in good health. His goal was to strengthen his position and support Rhaegar in maintaining family unity.

Seeing the determination in Viserys's eyes, Daemon narrowed his gaze, deep in thought. He realized his brother had sensed his own ambitions.

After a moment, Daemon exhaled deeply, his lips curving into a smile as he resumed his usual nonchalant demeanor. "I agree. The king deserves to have a dragon."

With Daemon's support, others were compelled to take a stance. "I also agree. Father is looking out for more than just himself; he's looking out for the family," Rhaegar said, raising his right hand in full support. He recognized that his father's proposal would help maintain control over Daemon and Aegon, ensuring a smoother path for their future.

With two votes of confidence, Viserys smiled, looking expectantly at Lyonel and the other advisors.

Lyonel furrowed his brows, his expression serious as he considered the implications.

Otto's eyes were sharp, constantly gauging the expressions of those present. Grand Maester Mellos fidgeted with his hands hidden in his sleeves, his wrinkled face radiating disapproval.

"Well, say something," Viserys demanded, growing jittery at their hesitation.

Lyonel finally spoke up, "Your Grace, you are the king of a realm, and we have just been harassed by a wild dragon. You must understand the dangers involved."

Grand Maester Mellos followed with a stern rebuke, "Your Grace, your body is bruised and battered. Riding a dragon will only exacerbate your condition."

Otto was the last to speak, murmuring, "I agree with the two lords. Taming a dragon is no trivial matter."

Though Otto's motives were different—he didn't want the king to control the dragons and potentially limit the influence of his grandchildren—he chose his words carefully to avoid appearing selfish.

Viserys, facing unanimous opposition from his advisers, was furious. "I am the king! I tamed Balerion!"

Grand Maester Mellos, unphased, retorted, "That black dragon was dying, and you only rode it once."

An intense argument broke out. Viserys was determined to tame another dragon and fulfill his vision of soaring through the skies. Rhaegar supported his father, recognizing the potential benefits for the family. Daemon, ever the observer, chimed in occasionally, enjoying the unfolding drama.

Lyonel, Mellos, and Otto remained steadfast in their opposition, particularly Mellos, who argued vehemently about the dangers and the king's fragile health.

Half an hour passed.

"Ahem..." Viserys, his face reddened from the argument, was seized by a violent cough.

"Your physical condition is clear to yourself," Mellos reprimanded, his tone unyielding. "Venturing to tame a dragon will only harm you further."

Viserys, unable to stop coughing, pointed a trembling finger at Mellos, furious and frustrated.

Lyonel and Otto backed down, unwilling to provoke the king further. Mellos, however, continued, "Taming dragons is for the young. You are over forty..."

"Shut up!" Rhaegar's face darkened, his eyes glinting with anger.

The decision to tame a dragon was his father's alone. His role was to advise, not to dictate.

Mellos, momentarily taken aback, replied, "Prince, I am the Grand Maester, the best advisor in knowledge and wisdom."

"If you are truly wise, then heal my father's wounds first," Rhaegar retorted, his tone harsh.

Mellos, clearly flustered, stammered, "It's not my fault. It's the condition of the realm..."

"Oh, I suggest you shut up," Daemon interjected, his eyes glinting with amusement as if he were watching a prey.

"Father!" Rhaegar, supporting his father, who was still bent over coughing, shot a glance at Daemon.

The exchange seemed to embolden Mellos. Ignoring Otto's warning glance, he continued, "The king's physique is special. It's not that I..."

As soon as Mellos spoke, Rhaegar moved swiftly, not giving him a chance to finish.

Swish--

A dark light flashed as Blackfyre, the ancestral sword, unsheathed.

Before Mellos could react, Blackfyre's blade arced through the air, brushing past his ear.

Splat!

Mellos felt a cold sting and watched in horror as a bloodstained ear fell to the ground.

A brief silence ensued.

"Ah! My ear!"

Sharp pain hit him, and Mellos screamed, clutching the side of his head. He fell to the ground, writhing in agony, his head striking the floor repeatedly as cold sweat soaked his robes.

Daemon watched with interest, nudging the severed ear with his foot and snickering, "Told you to shut up."

The ear twitched in front of Mellos's eyes, as if still alive. He glared at Rhaegar in disbelief.

Rhaegar remained calm, planting Blackfyre's tip on the ground. "Do not impose your incompetence on the patient. You have failed in your duties."

Rhaegar had long suspected Mellos of ulterior motives but lacked evidence. Mellos's vehement opposition to taming the dragon seemed excessive, almost treasonous.

The scene had unfolded too quickly for anyone to fully grasp.

Lyonel, shaken by Mellos's plight, protested, "Prince, he is a royal adviser! You cannot dispose of him so casually!"

Rhaegar returned his cold stare, then looked to his father, who had stopped coughing.

Viserys, gasping for breath, gripped his eldest son's arm tightly. He hadn't expected such decisive action from Rhaegar.

"Your Grace, Mellos is both a Grand Maester and a Royal Advisor. He should not be treated this way," Lyonel appealed to the king's sense of justice.

"As Hand of the King, I cannot condone cruelty from the Heir."

"Lord Lyonel, there is more to this than meets the eye," Rhaegar interrupted. "Mellos failed to treat my father on purpose."

Lyonel was stunned, trying to process this accusation.

Rhaegar raised Blackfyre, its tip pointing at the fallen Mellos. "In his time at court, Mellos has provided only a handful of remedies for my father, none of which alleviated his suffering."

"That's not enough evidence," Otto interjected, his eyes deep and calculating.

Rhaegar's tone was icy. "Lord Jasper is incompetent and has wasted my father's time and energy."

By the time the spies discovered anything, Mellos would have been absolved of his sins.

Viserys, sensing the gravity of the situation, forced himself to speak, "Rhaegar, what do you propose?"

"Father, Mellos should be placed under house arrest and a new Maester summoned," Rhaegar replied firmly.

Viserys glanced at Lyonel and Otto before nodding. "Alright, let's do that."

He disengaged from Rhaegar's support and began ascending the stairs, not sparing Mellos a glance. After the argument, even the good-tempered man was full of anger.

It was better for his eldest son to cut off the other man's ear than for him to cut out the man's tongue.

His previously good opinion of Mellos had soured, and he felt a sense of relief at his eldest son's decisive action.

Once Viserys left, Daemon followed, leaving Rhaegar and the three royal advisers in the hall.

"Lord Lyonel, I hope you understand," Rhaegar said, attempting to ease the tension. "With Mellos under house arrest, Maester Orwyle will temporarily take over my father's treatment."

"Orwyle?" Lyonel asked, recalling the honest and serious assistant Maester.

Rhaegar nodded. "Orwyle comes from a noble family and has the ability to discern right from wrong. He will be tested first."

Rhaegar's words implied that the Citadel's influence over Maesters was problematic and needed scrutiny.

"I'm going to see my father. Mellos is in your custody," Rhaegar said flatly, wiping Blackfyre's bloodstained blade on Mellos's robes.

Blackfyre symbolized kingship—kingship could be stained with blood, but never tainted.

## Chapter 309: Splitting the Greens

### Evening

Dark clouds obscured the bright moon as the sea breeze beat against the walls of Stone Drum Tower, echoing like a distant drum.

Crunch!

A door creaked open and Rhaegar, dressed in black, stepped out.

He looked back and sighed softly. "Rest well, Father."

After facing the rejection of his decision and witnessing the treachery of the Grand Maester, Viserys was in an extremely bad mood and retreated to his room to numb his nerves with alcohol.

After a long afternoon, he was disheveled beyond recognition.

It was uncertain if he would ever regain his resolve to tame the dragon.

...

As Rhaegar descended the stairs from the top floor of the Stone Drum Tower, he intended to return to his room for some rest. He shared a room with Rhaenyra, and the two siblings often shared little secrets with each other.

Rounding a corner, he noticed a maid waiting discreetly. Rhaegar paused and cast a glance her way.

The maid lowered her head and carefully handed over a piece of letter paper, whispering, "A letter from Lady Sara."

"Got it," Rhaegar said, taking the letter and waving his hand to signal her departure.

The maid, as if given an amnesty, hurried down the stairs.

Sara had a knack for cultivating loyal subordinates, ensuring the maids of honor within the castle were well-trained to serve Rhaenyra.

Rhaegar found an unoccupied corner and unfolded the letter to read it.

"Borros dead... suspected poisoning... Rhaenys..."

The more Rhaegar read, the more alarmed he became, his eyebrows furrowing deeply.

Borros had died on his way back to Storm's End, confirming his prophecy with Helaena. According to Sara's speculation, it seemed Borros had been poisoned. The poison was of such high quality that the maester couldn't determine the cause.

Rhaenys, invited to witness her cousin Borros's death, stayed at Storm's End to accompany Lady Elenda, Borros's widow, who was thoroughly investigating the cause.

Clenching his fists, the letter crumpling in his palm, Rhaegar felt a cold sweat break out on his back.

"Borros is actually dead!"

Rhaegar murmured, his expression dazed.

A realm lord dying so suddenly hinted at a bold and daring plot. Such a scourge needed to be eradicated.

Rhaegar considered whether to present the letter to his father. As soon as Rhaenys returned to Storm's End, she had sent a letter to King's Landing, reporting Borros's death. The raven arrived in King's Landing first and was forwarded to Dragonstone, delayed along the way. Meanwhile, Sara had rushed to Storm's End and transmitted the message directly to Dragonstone via raven, much faster.

Before taking another step, Rhaegar dispelled the idea. The trip to Dragonstone Island was for dragon taming, not only for Aemond but also to encourage his father. Revealing this matter now would cause a shock, potentially further weakening his father's will to tame a dragon.

Besides...

Rhaegar recalled certain memories and muttered, "Borros likely died unnaturally. Someone must be plotting something."

Using simple reasoning, he thought about who would benefit the most from Borros's death. The widow, Lady Elenda? Some distant cousin with the right to inherit? The in-laws of the Caron House?

One by one, Rhaegar considered the possible beneficiaries connected to House Baratheon, carefully analyzing their motives.

After a moment, he shook his head and murmured, "No, these people don't gain enough to risk so much."

There was another crucial point.

These people lacked the capability to acquire such a sophisticated poison that could silently take a person's life.

Lady Elenda and Borros had a fair relationship as husband and wife, evidenced by their four daughters.

Borros had no brothers, and his distant cousins were too far removed in generations to have much contact or motive.

The CaronHouse's lands were in Nightsong, guarding the Dornish borderlands for generations. Their patriarch, Royce, was Borros' father-in-law, making it unlikely they would kill Borros.

Turning around, Rhaegar leaned on the staircase railing, deep in thought.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of a green potted plant by the fence.

The flash of green triggered a realization. "A marriage!" Rhaegar murmured.

Borros's death left no direct male heir, throwing the line of succession into uncertainty.

Two categories of people had the right to inherit:

1. Borros' four daughters.
2. Distant cousins with tenuous blood ties.

In Westeros, the tradition of the Andals favored male inheritance. However, it wasn't unheard of for women to inherit titles and lands, as exemplified by Jeyne of the Vale, who inherited the Eyrie at the age of three and became known as the Maiden of the Vale.

The Baratheon cousins' bloodline was too scattered and weak to make a successful claim.

Lady Elenda, Borros' widow, was effectively the head of Storm's End now, supported by her cousin Rhaenys. Elenda would likely push for one of her daughters to inherit, emulating Jeyne's situation, which would create a potential issue.

A woman in Westeros eventually had to marry. Jeyne had avoided marriage to retain her power and prevent her husband's dominance. If Cassandra, one of Borros's daughters, inherited Storm's End, she would be a second Jeyne.

At this moment, the Four Storms were considering a union with Aemond. If Aemond married Cassandra and she inherited Storm's End, he would gain significant power and influence over the Stormlands.

A storm of realization swept through Rhaegar's mind, and he exclaimed in shock, "Alicent, Larys!"

The ones who stood to benefit the most from such a marriage were Alicent and Otto's faction, the so-called Green Faction, as well as Aemond.

Otto was too cautious and arrogant to commit such a bold act. Larys, however, was different.

After a brief interaction, Rhaegar had discerned that Larys was someone accustomed to darkness and repression.

Larys served as the King's Inquisitor, assisting the Master of Laws, Jasper, in prisoner interrogations. No prisoner who faced Larys remained silent, as his methods were rumored to be extremely cruel.

Alicent's character was twisted. Outwardly obedient to her father and husband, she tried to play the role of a good wife and mother. Inwardly, she was proud, unwilling to be subordinate, and fiercely protective.

After a long period of internal conflict, Alicent was restless and desperate for change, making Larys the perfect partner for her ambitions.

Recalling the night of the Kingswood Hunt, Rhaegar had seen Alicent and Larys plotting in private. He wondered, "When did the idea of poisoning Borros arise?"

It was likely around the same time his dream foretold the death of the White Hart.

Comparing the timeline of Borros's death in Sara's letter, it matched closely with Helaena's prophecy.

"The world is full of coincidences," Rhaegar mused. "But too many coincidences aren't normal."

Regardless of the truth, he had classified Alicent and Larys as dangerous.

After some thought, Rhaegar decided it was time to act.

...

The following day, in the town of Dragonstone Island:

Rhaegar, draped in black robes, led a group of Dragonkeepers. Behind him, Aemond, Helaena, Cassandra and Maris of the Four Storms followed closely. The other two sisters of the Four Storms were too young and had been left behind.

As they walked along the dirt road, flanked by densely packed stone and wood houses, traders occasionally crossed their path. In the distance, the towering Dragonmont loomed, an active volcano surrounded by mountains and jungles.

Aemond ran ahead, excitement lighting up his face. "Brother, when are we going to tame the dragon?"

Rhaegar, his face hidden under his hood, smiled slightly. "Eager, are we?"

"Uh-huh," Aemond nodded vigorously. "I want to go to Dragonmont, where Vermithor is sleeping!"

His recent encounter with the wild dragon Sheepstealer had only heightened his desire for the strongest dragon, surpassing even Grey Ghost and Stormcloud. The Bronze Fury, Vermithor, had filled his thoughts, a legacy of their great-grandfather Jahaerys.

Rhaegar rubbed Aemond's head and asked curiously, "Why not choose Silverwing?"

He didn't bother mentioning Sheepstealer; after all, few desired an ugly, wild dragon.

"Because Vermithor is stronger, second only to Vhagar and Cannibal!" Aemond replied without hesitation.

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow, scrutinizing his younger brother. A good ambition, if a bit brash. It reminded him of Maegor I, who, in his youth, had refused to hatch eggs or tame young dragons, insisting only the strongest dragon was worthy of him.

Maegor had later seized the throne from his nephew Aegon.

Noticing Rhaegar's strange gaze, Aemond winced, sensing he might have upset him. Thinking quickly, he added, "Father will also tame dragons. Silverwing is gentler and would be suitable for him."

Rhaegar's lips curled into a smile. "You're sincere."

He didn't mind Aemond's ambition. Most Targaryens shared that trait. More importantly, he appreciated Aemond's honesty—a quality perhaps fostered by Rhaegar's own gentle treatment.

Unlike others, Aemond felt comfortable speaking freely with Rhaegar, a refreshing contrast to Aegon, who only seemed interested in drinking and consorting with prostitutes.

Rhaegar put his arm around Aemond's shoulder and turned to Cassandra, speaking gently, "I need to have a word with Aemond. Please excuse us."

Cassandra, flustered by Rhaegar's grace, whispered, "Prince, please go ahead."

"Thank you." Rhaegar smiled politely, guiding Aemond toward a nearby well.

Cassandra watched him go, her hands clasped over her chest, her voice barely audible, "You're welcome."

Rhaegar, the Heir of the King, was handsome, skilled in martial arts, and had ridden a dragon to conquer the Stepstones. He was her ideal marriage partner.

Seeing her sister's wistful expression, Maris nudged her. "Rhaegar has an engagement. Don't forget our purpose!"

Maris, too, admired Rhaegar but knew her place better than her sisters.

At the back, Helaena observed the whispering sisters, suspicion flickering in her eyes. But no one paid them much mind.

Rhaegar and Aemond sat on the well's edge. "What is it you want to tell me, brother?" Aemond leaned into his brother's embrace, his eyes wide with curiosity.

#### Chapter 310: Winning Over Aemond

The brothers sat by the well, facing the three girls who kept their distance.

Rhaegar placed his hands on Aemond's shoulders, his voice gentle. "You've spent days with the Four Storms. Is there one who has caught your eye?"

Aemond's head drooped at the mention of marriage, clearly disinterested.

"You'll marry sooner or later, and at least now you have four candidates," Rhaegar said, shaking his head with a faint smile. "Every proud man resists an arranged marriage unless the match is truly exceptional."

"Actually, I'm not keen on this marriage," Aemond muttered, looking defeated. "If I had to choose, it would be Cassandra."

Rhaegar glanced at Cassandra. She had the classic Baratheon features: long black hair down to her waist and bright, captivating eyes that exuded an aristocratic aura. Among the Four Storms, Maris was clever but plain, and the other two were too young, only three and four years old. Seventeen-

year-old Cassandra stood out with her intelligence and beauty, her long legs complementing her tall figure.

Rhaegar winked and chuckled softly. "Not a bad choice. She's only six years older than you. Rhaenyra and I have an eight-year gap."

Aemond looked up indignantly. "Rhaenyra is a Targaryen; Cassandra is just a Baratheon!"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Rhaegar said, taken aback by Aemond's vehemence. He wasn't angry; he found Aemond's fierce loyalty to their lineage commendable.

Realizing his outburst, Aemond glanced nervously at Cassandra and her sisters, ensuring they hadn't overheard. Relieved, he sighed. "The regret is mine. Only you and Aegon were ever fit to marry a Targaryen."

Family tradition dictated that the eldest male heirs married within the family, while younger heirs allied with other noble houses.

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow, sensing deeper implications in Aemond's words. Deciding not to press, he asked casually, "Does Alicent support you marrying Cassandra?"

"She can't wait for me to pick the eldest and win Lord Borros' favor," Aemond said bitterly.

Rhaegar smiled coldly, tightening his grip on Aemond's shoulder. "House Baratheon is powerful. Their support will strengthen you and our family."

Shifting the conversation, he said, "Vermithor and Silverwing are resting in Dragonmont. For safety, I suggest you bond with Silverwing first. It's more docile, as you said."

The topic of marriage ended there. It was clear Alisant had urged Aemond to choose Cassandra, likely knowing she would inherit Storm's End.

Aemond, oblivious to his brother's machinations, said earnestly, "I want to tame Vermithor. It's stronger and can help me regain my honor."

Rhaegar frowned at Aemond's candidness, sensing a dangerous negativity in him. Under his brother's stern gaze, Aemond lowered his head, admitting, "Aegon always mocks me, and courtiers whisper that I'm not even as good as little Daeron."

Rhaegar's eyes flashed with anger. Aemond was his brother, blood of his blood, and no one had the right to demean him.

With a cold, determined look, Rhaegar pressed Aemond's head to his chest and whispered fiercely, "If anyone mocks you again, you will pull out his tongue."

Aemond looked up, shocked by his brother's intensity.

Rhaegar's expression remained stern. "You have that right, as long as you're certain they laughed at you."

"Mother always taught me not to shame myself with others," Aemond stammered, recalling his mother's teachings.

It was clear that Rhaegar's approach starkly contrasted with his mother's advice.

Rhaegar gazed into Aemond's trembling eyes, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Alicent is not a Targaryen; she can't raise you properly."

"But..."

"She's a Hightower," Rhaegar interrupted, his tone sharp. "A name synonymous with self-interest."

Aemond looked around, confusion and turmoil churning inside him. Rhaegar let the silence stretch, confident that Aemond would come to understand. The Targaryens were from Valyria, a lineage unlike any other in Westeros—marked by chaos, nobility, and flame.

As Aemond wrestled with his thoughts, Rhaegar pulled out a small square stone and a carving knife from his Space Bracelet. The blade moved swiftly, almost as if it were an extension of Rhaegar's hand. Within minutes, a three-headed red dragon emerged on the stone's surface.

Aemond, distracted by the sounds, watched Rhaegar's deft movements. Rhaegar continued carving on the other side, etching intricate High Valyrian symbols and strange lines. Aemond's eyes widened as he tried to make sense of the symbols.

The stone was soon adorned with a pattern of circular lines, resembling a slender dragon coiled around the surface. With both sides complete, Rhaegar cut his finger and let a drop of blood fall onto the carved stone.

The blood flowed through the grooves, staining the dragon and runes a deep crimson. The transformation was swift and mesmerizing, turning the stone into something otherworldly. Rhaegar, satisfied, sealed his wound with a touch.

"Here, keep it," Rhaegar said, tossing the stone to Aemond.

Aemond caught it clumsily, inspecting the now-blood-stained carving. "You know stone carving?"

"Obviously," Rhaegar replied with a nonchalant smile. He had learned the skill from his father, Viserys, during one of the rare peaceful periods after becoming the heir. It was a respite from the rigorous education demanded by the Maesters of the Citadel.

Aemond gazed adoringly at his older brother, turning the stone tablet over in his hands. "What does it do? Why did you drip blood on it?"

"Obey," Rhaegar instructed.

"Huh?" Aemond's eyes widened in confusion.

Rhaegar smiled. "It's High Valyrian, it means 'Obey'."

Aemond cocked his head, still puzzled.

Rhaegar continued, "When you face a dragon you want to tame, raise the stone plaque and shout that phrase. It will help."

The engraving on the stone tablet was a pacification technique from the Forbidden Spell. Rhaegar didn't trust his siblings enough to give them the full spell, but he wanted to help Aemond a little. Infused with his blood, the stone held a momentary effect. Using it while taming a dragon wouldn't guarantee success but would at least protect Aemond from dragonfire.

"Really?" Aemond asked, eyes wide as he stared at the tablet.

He had heard rumors from his sister Helaena about Rhaegar's mysterious powers, so he was half-skeptical.

"Of course," Rhaegar replied simply.

Still unsure, Aemond examined the stone tablet.

Rhaegar shook his head, stood up, and brushed the stone chips off his black robe. He held out the steel carving knife for Aemond to see.

Aemond glanced away, uncertain.

With a flick of his wrist, Rhaegar's palm burst into flames, the heat distorting the air and forcing Aemond to lean back. The steel carving knife twisted and melted, dripping molten iron onto the ground.

Aemond was stunned, watching the iron cool and smoke on the damp soil.

Rhaegar shook his hand clean of any residue and asked calmly, "Do you believe now?"

Aemond, still in shock, nodded. "Yes, I believe."

"Very well," Rhaegar said, putting his hands behind his back. "The experienced Dragonkeepers will take you and Helaena to Dragonmont to familiarize yourselves with the environment. I have other matters to attend to."

As he turned to leave, Aemond called out, "Wait!"

Rhaegar stopped but didn't turn around.

He wanted to support his underappreciated younger brother and, in doing so, gather a fragile heart that had been suppressed for a long time. When carving the stone tablet, he had thought through his plans. By giving it to Aemond, he hoped to foster their brotherly bond without destroying it.

"Wait, Rhaegar," Aemond called again, running to stand in front of his brother.

This time, he didn't call out to his older brother as he usually did but addressed him as he would Aegon.

Rhaegar's mouth curled into a slight smile. "What's the matter?"

"I... I wanted to say thank you."

Nervous and unable to find the right words, Aemond clutched the stone tablet and looked up at Rhaegar with one eye.

Rhaegar remained silent, gazing at him calmly.

"I... I wanted to say thank you," Aemond repeated, summoning all his courage. As soon as the words left his mouth, he lowered his head, closing his eyes in embarrassment.

He feared Rhaegar's ridicule, having been teased often by Aegon about his knowledge of manners. But the expected mockery never came.

Rhaegar reached out and ruffled Aemond's hair, smiling warmly. "Aemond, you are my brother. Just as Daemon never says thank you to our father, you don't need to thank me."

He gave Aemond a final pat on the shoulder and turned to leave, but Aemond grabbed his black robes in a fluster. "This is different!"

Rhaegar turned back, curiosity in his eyes, waiting to see what Aemond had to say.

"I understand the conflicts you have with Grandfather and the others," Aemond continued. "I am not a fool and can recognize good from bad."

Rhaegar waited patiently as Aemond struggled to find his words.

"What I'm trying to say is..." Aemond gritted his teeth, finally making up his mind. Holding the stone tablet with one hand and making a solemn gesture with the other, he declared, "I swear to the old and new gods that no matter the future glory or disgrace, I will never do anything to betray my family or my kingdom!"

For the first time, Aemond met his brother's gaze firmly, his eyes full of determination.

Rhaegar smiled and nodded. "Very good!"

The more he looked at Aemond, the more satisfied he became. Aemond exhaled in relief, his hand covering his racing heart.

Without giving Aemond a chance to catch his breath, Rhaegar pulled him into a tight embrace, resting his head against his chest. Aemond looked up in bewilderment.

"Your mother may have raised Aegon wrong, but you, you are still good," Rhaegar said, his eyes filled with relief. He ruffled Aemond's hair again and gave him a light kiss on the forehead—a blunt display of Targaryen affection.

Aemond stood trembling, feeling the warmth of his brother's touch. After a moment, Rhaegar raised his head. Aemond, regaining his senses, hugged Rhaegar tightly and whispered, "Brother."